

AN·OPERETTA  
IN·PROFILE

BY

·CZEIKĀ·













AN OPERETTA IN PROFILE





An  
Operetta  
In  
Profile

BY  
CZEIKA



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY  
The Riverside Press, Cambridge  
1889

*Copyright, 1887,*  
BY TICKNOR AND COMPANY.

---

*All rights reserved.*

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

---

Raya Yog.	The Doppelgänger.
The Portrait.	The United Brooms.
Mrs. Pepperton.	Mrs. Adullam.
Lucy Pepperton.	The Policeman.
The Statues.	The Attorney.
Mr. Skeggs.	The Attorney's Wife.
Miss Skeggs.	The Butcher's Wife.
Midnight.	Madame Chiff-Chaff.
The Author.	The Dressmaker.
The Committee.	The Dissatisfied Husbands.
The Charactagent Victims.	
Mary McGinnis's Green Gown.	
The Fastidious Family.	
My Ideal Young Man.	
Raya Yog's Marionettes.	
The Three Presbyterian Burglars.	
The Girl who made the Diagram.	



## *An Operetta in Profile.*

---

*“A gentleman born, master parson, who writes himself armigero ; in any bill, quit-tance, or obligation, armigero.”*

PAPA is on a salary; that means — it means what I should call a life of vulgar fractions. We never have anything whole and perfect of its sort. It is always one half, or two thirds, so to speak, of something else. Thus when the Peppertons, who are our leading family, give their two annual receptions, and I attend, — as of course I must, — I am not actually wearing a *crêpe-de-chine* gown, but one fourth of papa's new hat, one half of mamma's spring wrap, and all of Dick's bicycle stockings.

Should I stray into the Arabian Nights, and should the old formula be pronounced over my belongings, — “If you wear this form through mere passing conjuration, resume your former aspect,” — I should change on the spot, and resemble nothing so much as one of those attenuated clothes-horses they offer you in German hotels in place of a closet, on which you desperately hang your hats, overshoes, gloves, wraps, and gowns in a heap. On the same principle our Christmas-tree is really papa’s new great-coat, and his name on a subscription list is simply eight pounds of our roast beef. We are as unreal as any astronomical appearance, — sunrise, or the starry march of the constellations; no more what we seem than the great golden moon coming up out of a cleft of fire to poise one breathless



instant on a sapphire sea. Should you pull our bell before conventional calling hours, you will hear a rushing and scrambling and hurrying about. That signifies we are caught sweeping or pudding-making in tin-peddlers' gowns. Tin-peddlers' gowns are those that should be sold as rags to the tin-man, but are worn instead till five o'clock in the afternoon, because one tailor-made gown in a season is the largest precipitate to be had from those difficulties in solution that we call our income. Still, it is conceded that we are people of some distinction, because papa spent all mamma's money ten or twelve years ago, and because if you substitute "ulph" for "le," the final "le" of our name, it becomes the same as that of a great English family dating from the Crusades, as it is spelled on their tombstones.

*“ To be called into a huge sphere and not to be seen to move in it, are the holes where the eyes should be.”*

SOME classical old body said, on the death of a friend, “that the theatre of all his actions had fallen.” Now, when papa dies, the theatre of our actions will be closed for want of funds, — that is, society will cut us; that is, I should not be asked to Mrs. Pepperton’s perennial receptions, and Martha Curtis will nod kindly, but will not invite me to her equally perennial lunch-party. And though Miss Curtis and Mrs. Pepperton look microscopic, — beside, say, the Influence of the Romish Church on Civilization, or Esoteric Buddhism, or Geological Epochs, — they make as re-

spectable a theatre for one's actions as if they had been named Portia or Calpurnia, and lived two thousand years ago, presenting to view the very bare arms and impossible drapery of that period. Tied up in this fact are the strings that pulled our Operetta into shape; for it was I who first suggested an Operetta. To begin, though, you should have the social geography and moral boundaries of our town, for your better comprehension of — no, sympathy is the word, with — my conclusions. They *are* mine; right or wrong, broad or narrow, they are mine absolutely, as if I had drawn them under some banyan-tree in Paradise, without prejudice from Adam, Eve, or the Serpent. And I want to make them yours; for your only good reader is that loyalist who thinks just as you do while he is under your banner.

As some towns might be situated exactly on the equator, I should say ours stands precisely on the line of the average. Anything that was special about the life, house, or character of anybody in town would be, and is, discouraged. There is an average standard of commonplace and inefficient action for the conduct of matters in general, and whatever ranks, that is regarded with suspicion. A man with his trademark on his opinions, a clever, inventive, or even a very thoroughbred or fascinating person, is vaguely considered doubtful; and such individuals are so coolly received and so ironically regarded when they chance to stray among us that the length of their stay is sure to be limited by the length of their first house-lease. If it is true that ideas are the only realities, then our town, properly looked at,

must present a mere dissolving view on a faint horizon. We encourage nothing pronounced. Even the very children affect measles and scarlatina moderately, taking them in a perfunctory manner, as a matter of business to be got out of hand. And though there may be the average number of chronic invalids, few people venture on the decided step of dying; and in that event the community takes it rather ill, as if "they should have died by attorney," or as if the town possessed a patent of immortality, and deceased had infringed it. It is quite the same in minor matters; for communities, like individuals, stamp a miniature of themselves, even on trifles. Within twenty-five miles of New York city we wear last year's fashions, as if we were — Philadelphians. Our winters blossom now and then in a

stunted german, but we have not yet learned the use of the word "cotillion;" and in the year 1885 we were guilty of our first Afternoon Tea, and people consulted each other privately about the gowns and etiquette proper to such occasions.

So conservative are we that Raya Yog told papa at his own table that we had never assimilated the Declaration of Independence, and that we should do well to adopt the American Constitution, which was a wise and benign theory of government. Whether Raya Yog is Hindoo or Parsee, or what is the precise difference between the two, I am not clear; but he is olive-tinted, though well-bred, and we all regarded him on a "Greenland's Icy Mountains"—no, "India's Coral Strand"—basis, and were as much astonished



at his sarcasms as though the Sphinx should open her granite lips and give her Egyptian opinions of a cockney tourist and his plaids and slang. As I have told you, we are people of consideration; therefore our dinner given to Raya Yog was styled "a social event" by the local newspapers, and the principal Nonentities of the town were present, to be informed by this prying heathen "how McMahon, ex-hack-driver and present justice of peace, told a voteless and bribeless defendant that he should decide against him, no matter what testimony and witnesses should be presented; and how he habitually decided in the very teeth of evidence, sharing the profits with certain petty shopkeepers and attorneys. He was," said Raya Yog, "a votary of the modern black art, bringing about results by the help

of a ring as magical as Aladdin's. And he administered law after the fashion of Milesian kings, and with the rude and vigorous candor of the fourteenth century." And as papa admitted afterwards (privately) that it was true, and could not be touched upon because of certain political interests, that huge engraving in our dining-room of the Declaration of Independence is simply ridiculous; for we have not yet come into the Union. For the rest, there is a continual social friction that rubs the tender edges of one's soul. You know how Queen Victoria was afraid of being "as common as the Cambridges." We are as much afraid of being "common" as her Majesty; but we are never *sure who are our Cambridges*. Nothing is substantive and perfect of its kind. Our pleasure is always a second-story pleasure, and the

bottom planks are the capricious neglect or cordiality of somebody else; consequently quite out of our reach, and likely to drop out at any time. We have not even a liking of our own. We can never be quite certain if we wish to go or to stay away, to take up a thing or drop it, till we learn what Lucy Pepperton means to do about the matter. Finally, there is something special in our moral atmosphere. A great many persons in our community go as far as this with charity, — that “they believe all things.” Poddles, “also one of ours,” sees and hears what she can, imagines what she can neither hear nor see, and gives it all to the town in a daily edition. The first-named people supply the carbon and oxygen; Poddles adds the chlorine. The result is something very special in our moral air, — special in an unpleasant

way. There you have us in rough outline, and can figure before I begin to tell you in what a genial, liberal, progressive, and pleasant manner we were likely to set about our Operetta.

*“’Tis no matter how it be in tune, so  
it make noise enough.”*

THE Operetta — the scheme of it, rather — found general favor. No one in the town could sing, and that is the first requisite of an Operetta. As I told you, the suggestion was mine. I have always in mind that possible closing of the family theatre for lack of funds, and the need of a younger and more energetic manager than papa, — a — in short, a husband. And why should not the Operetta prove a fairy godmother who could turn a pumpkin into a coach, and take me in it to find the fairy prince? Not that I believe in fairy princes except as a manner of speaking; the race is

extinct, — died out, at any rate, with Nathaniel Hawthorne. His wife found him “so tender and true, so just, so magnanimous always” under a yoke of poverty, in spite of the daily frets of a difficult life. Ah! it makes the heart stand still, and brings tears to the eyes. No wonder she “could not realize her happiness,” and passed her days in “a delightful confusion of bliss.” A woman might serve such a man on her knees, and thank God; “but when comes such another?” A girl’s fancy is generally a theatrical property-room, from which she fits out the men of her acquaintance, the real man simply acting as an animated clothes-horse. But young as I am, I have made the grand discovery of life, — that the average young man is simply a grown-up boy. Though his shirt-front is so mysterious, his manner so reas-



suring and impenetrable, his smile so bland, he is only a grown-up boy. More! he is generally a boy in difficulties. He is happy as a centaur who should be unable to accommodate his legs to the upholstery of a drawing-room, and his head and shoulders to the economies of a manger, since he is sure to have \$12,000 a year ideas on \$1,200 a year of income. He sympathizes with girls on the matrimonial question as a trout does with the fisherman. Every flat or dwelling house shows him twelve or fifteen hundred reasons against matrimony, in its rent; and he has a multiplication-table ready for Cupid, warranted to take the point from his best arrow. If ever the little blind god is likely to prove too much for him, he has only to fall back on his arithmetic; and when the sirens sing, in place of tying himself to the

mast, he simply ciphers out the probable cost of their music. Only in his summer vacations he takes with his canoe a certain amount of sentiment; and having selected a tennis-court and a "base-ball nine," looks about him for a "summer girl," one easy-mannered, susceptible, available for a crescendo flirtation (limited to two weeks). He lays away her memory with his racket and bat, or possibly coins the affair into dollars, — writes a verse or two like a sigh, with a catching refrain, for "Life" or some such periodical, and gets a cheque for it. All this before the summer Ariadne who took his canoe party for a voyage of life, and has packed up all her best sentiments, and the family blessing, has well closed the mouth that she opened in astonishment when he bade her good-by.

During the winter he sometimes pays a bill, and sometimes a call, — both from necessity; and then figure to yourself the embarrassment of a tribe of friendly savages meeting a white traveller for the first time. In such a call *we* are the friendly savages. The young man is to us as rare, unexpected, and inexplicable as the white traveller. We survey him with awe and dumb delight in the true savage manner. The heads of our tribe talk stale newspaper, and inquire after his grandmother; we girls giggle convulsively; and having no idea what to say to him, indeed knowing nothing to say, giggle again. The clock ticks in that intrusive way peculiar to clocks; Bob and Kate rub about his legs and crush his hat. His honors sit uneasily on him; he shrinks under the family stare, and the general joy appalls him

lest he should be accepted in advance for some daughter of the family. When he goes, we are quite certain he will never come again; and he never does. I doubt if Psyche herself could marry out of a "suburban home" in a second-rate suburban town.

*“ You are no surer, no, than is the coal of fire upon the ice, or hailstone in the sun.”*

THE second requisite for the production of an Operetta in our town is Lucy Pepperton. The high protective tariff on ideas, the chronic persecution of anything above the average, has left a community without force or individuality, — something like those inert sea-jellies that sting; only, being human, superior to the jelly in the power of active envy. Our local form of attack on any enterprise from whose executive list we have been omitted, is to strike it with creeping paralysis by declaring the proposed affair “doubtful,” “mixed,” or “not re-

spectable; " and so little self-confidence is there anywhere, that the Pepperton family, who rule among us by virtue of wealth, liberality, public spirit, and tact, are the only known antidote for such an attack. Consequently, as I said, Lucy Pepperton was the second requisite. To obtain her co-operation the Operetta was announced as "for the benefit of the church," and many curious and most unexpected events resulted from this announcement; among others a letter from Raya Yog,—a remarkable letter, which will be given in its proper place.

The *sine qua non* was that the Operetta should be original; that is, it should be written by some one in town acquainted with local needs. The Operetta must of course be given to the world by a club. Whatever the matter in hand, a club for despatching it is as



necessary to us as to Hercules; and the *dramatis personæ*, like the stock in a ready-made-clothing store, must be adapted to fit those persons who would be invited to join the club, and the Operetta itself to our town-hall. When the New Zealand Exploring Society excavates our town, I prophesy that its town-hall will give them a longer pause than anything else they may find on the American continent, it will be so impossible to decide from any ordinary reasoning for what it could have been intended. It is of no particular style, and seems to be of no special use. If a dance is in question, it has neither dressing nor supper rooms. As a lecture room or theatre, it has no private entrance, no withdrawing room, and no stage, except a narrow shelf at the end of the room like a schoolmaster's ros-

trum. It could not have been devised for the public, — at least for more than three hundred of it, for that is its seating capacity, — and it might be an embodied nightmare for its hideousness, or a packing-case for Bartholdi's Liberty from its shape; all of which infirmities must, as is evident, be carefully considered in the make-up of our Operetta. There was no difficulty about the music. The Operetta, like an American girl abroad, could marry itself to any wandering air of foreign extraction that proved suitable; but its libretto must be local.

It was very easy to find the writer; for there was but one woman in town capable of it, — a woman much despised by us for her cleverness, as a late fashion or invention is set at naught in a country village. She was very subject to new and excellent ideas, that we at first ridi-

culed and then adopted, but for which we never forgave her; and — crowning weakness! — being very simple and magnanimous (I am not sure, by the way, that one of these qualities is not a consequence of the other), she was continually assisting her enemies and obliging her detractors, — for which she received her just due of contempt. She had not an idea of making much of her wares; one would have supposed, from her readiness when our committee visited her, that it was an every-day matter to have librettos on hand, — like pies. She brought out her ideas as if they were bits of old lace from some perfumed box, and altered and re-altered them to suit our demands, as one takes in or lets out the body of a gown, — all with such careless ease that though her libretto has since been pronounced clever enough for the

professional stage, we felt not so much that she exhibited genius, as a frivolous cast of mind inconsistent with her circumstances, as she is a woman of forty and of limited income. Even in society it is impossible *always* to get on without ideas; and if these entities prefer the company of old coats and shabby gowns, one must take them where they can be found, — but with a certain disapprobation, as in our case; as though our author had stolen her manners and libretto from Mrs. Pepperton, who on an income of twenty thousand a year might be supposed to be in a position to set up ideas and refinements of feeling, and keep them up in good style. .

•

*“ Have you the lion’s part written ?  
Pray you, if it be, give it to me, for I am  
slow of study.”*

MEANTIME we examined the sketch of the first act. Curtain rising on a gallery of Statues (an excellent scene for the narrow shelf that must make our stage) ; lights down ; music, tum-ti-tum, *tum-ti-tum* ; violoncello throb and muffled drum-thud, — a far-away note of preparation ; statues, — fisher-girls, flower-maidens, Morning, Spring, etc., some twenty of them : a pretty effect, and an excellent idea for using girls of bony pattern and the awkward persuasion ; girls who habitually sit on one foot and walk with stiff elbows and short steps,

and are mentally unable to get through a line without a giggle, yet whose fathers own corner lots or something in Wall Street. Hidden in antique drapery, and toned down and kept in by drill, they (not the fathers or the corner lots) would damage the Operetta as little as could be expected. Their leader perforce must be Lucy Pepperton; for although the first scene of the Operetta was not yet written, and we were still in consultation over it, that dear Poddles was already making morning calls to discuss the improprieties of the Venus de Milo and her sisterhood. By way of checkmate we were obliged to lose no time in getting out a photograph of the "Minerva Giustiani" (we called it, by the by, the "Mother of the Gracchi," as better suited to the Poddles mind); also an announcement that twenty-five yards

of unbleached muslin would be the smallest possible quantity required by each Statue, and that Miss Pepperton would lead the Statue dances. These last were carefully characterized as stately minuets, the first to be danced to the allegro, Opus 10, of Beethoven. Not at all because our town knows Beethoven as a dramatic writer, a man leading delicate fantasies from sombre depths to dizziest heights of shivering, rapturous harmony, voicing in one and the same breath the Hallelujah chorus of the whole world, and mankind's wail of intolerable anguish,—and that with such weird notes of preparation, such marshalling of forces, such dainty, elfin, flying repetitions of haunting sweetness! Far from it! The town holds his writings as heavy, dull, and ugly,—therefore respectable.

Getting back to the libretto as the curtain rose on the darkened gallery of Statues, a deep resounding bell slowly sounded the twelve strokes of midnight. Rose-lights began to glow and deepen on the Statues, animating by slow degrees and coming down from their pedestals, so many skips and stops to so many bars of music; posing with devitalized, then with vitalized limbs, the music energizing with them in a languid, swaying measure, deepening into notes of weird stir and warning. The Statues wheeling, hesitating, pausing, advancing to form the minuet; at which juncture the Portrait (the only one in the gallery), a life-size of George Washington in his youth and the hero of the Operetta, drawn by the spell of the hour, steps from its frame and leads the measure.

Now, about this portrait there could



be no question. The mantle of the leading *rôle* could fall on but one pair of shoulders, — those of a young man to whom fate had already assigned one trying *rôle*, that of the single good *parti* in town. It was fortunate for us that he counted more than six notes in his voice, and not more than one pair of legs and arms on the stage, and added the graces of wit, humor, and dramatic genius to those of money and social prestige; for he was as inevitable as death. And perhaps it is time to say here that he was down on my private programme for something more, — the required fairy prince; that is, if, as I hoped, the Operetta should prove a true godmother, and present me with Cinderella's luck and her pumpkin.

The libretto went on to say that the statue minuet having occurred in that

precise half hour in the century in which inanimate objects may claim the privilege of living at will, Midnight in vain attempts to recall the dancers to her kingdom of Silence and Shadows, the curtain falls on the Portrait and his family of Statues in full revolt and preparing to enter the world of life.

*“ You have not seen such a thing as it is ; I can hardly forbear burling things.”*

So behold us fairly launched on the first act and its rehearsal in the Pepperton parlors, full of a pleasantly important sense of well-being in our familiarity with their yellow satin upholstery and white and gold furniture ; and finding in the management that bouquet of privilege, that piquant sense of the envy of the excluded, that brings one into sympathy with the gods as disposers of men, with the right to much laughter at their expense, — or with any other petty power, as a head-waiter, or a new rich family who are not allowing time “to wash off the double guilt of their oppor-

tunity." We found anxieties also, as if they had been pins stuck in the yellow satin sofas. Like the people of Nineveh, our amateurs did not know their right hand from their left. Nor could the Statues be brought to remember their poses, or the business of the minuet, so anxious was each individual to attract the special attention of the Portrait, who was also the notable *parti* of our society. And did he but glance in their direction, lo! a universal simper rippling across their marble calm, and every Statue of them swaying about on her pedestal.

Next, the setting of the second act, from the peculiarities of the stage, was also pronounced impossible; and yet we were unwilling to relinquish this second act as it stood. In it the Portrait, having been turned away from all the principal hotels because of his inexplicable family

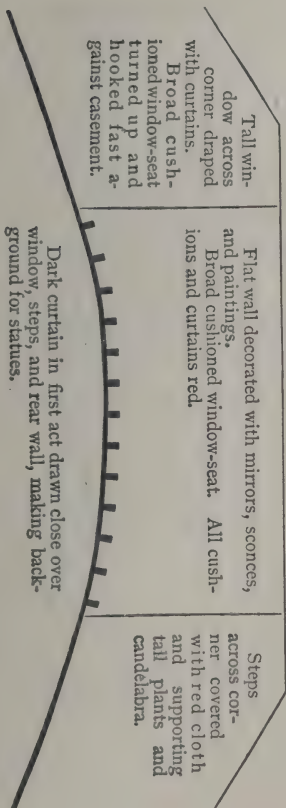
of Statues, boldly enters a private dwelling. This is the residence of Mr. Skeggs and his wife; they regard him as some Romeo, who, having invited the ballet to supper, had forgotten the way home afterwards. But the Portrait explains that he is a reporter of the New York "Herald," travelling with an automatic show that he has bought on speculation. There was an airy smartness in the dialogue, and cleverness in the situations, the conceits, and the local hits, that made us unwilling in any way to alter the libretto. Yet it demanded a handsome interior, a drawing-room,—and drawing-rooms demand furniture. Now, as there were no dressing-rooms, no side spaces worthy of mention (mere standing room for the *dramatis personæ*), no back entrance, no second staircase, where could any drawing-room furniture

be stored during the progress of the first act? It could scarcely be handed in piece by piece over the heads of the audience. We were at a dead-lock, and it looked as if the fairy godmother Operetta was playing me a game of chess in place of manœuvring her pumpkin, and was finding me a checkmate instead of the traditional glass slipper. "The times were out of joint," and it should have been I "who set them right." Instead, there was handed me a diagram like the cabalistic chalk-mark that some tramp scores over your door. There was a long story behind it, if you only knew how to read it.

Plans and diagrams are stupid, perhaps, but this one is not to be skipped. This bit of clever simplicity was devised by the girl *who had specially not been asked to join our club*. People about

# DIAGRAM OF STAGE.

## *First Act.*



## *Second Act.*

Draw away dark curtain. Let down seats and place cushions. Light candles in sconces and candelabra. Throw down Oriental rugs.

her were talking about our difficulties. "Difficult," said she, "not at all!" and then and there dashed off this sketch and gave it to the Portrait, *my* fairy prince, coupled with an offer of Oriental rugs, cushions, and curtains, — killing a wasp, you see, with sweet oil; the wasp being I.

I am giving you this Operetta microscopically; that is, you are looking through the microscope, and I am speaking as one of the animalculæ. So,

"If with such talent Heaven had blessed her,  
Had I not reason to detest her?"

You remember what the Soothsayer told Antony: "Thy lustre sickens when he shines by; make space enough between you." Antony, as one of the "three world-sharers," could choose his space where he liked. I, since I had no



Egypt like Antony, was making space for myself in my drop of water. It required no Soothsayer to explain to me who threw me into the shade by her shining, nor is much arithmetic required in counting the marriageable men among us. There are eight. Of course there are other men in town, — derby-wearers, tax-payers, voters; and there may be sprouting great men among them. Having read biographies of everybody distinguished, I am deeply convinced that I shall bewail too late having snubbed the future Man of his Time and Hero of his Hour, because the Men of their Time are never labelled and assorted like seeds, so that one never knows what one has in hand, an oak or a cabbage. Not looking at matters prophetically, however, there were in our social parlance eight men — with the addition of such

New York exotics as could be coaxed to risk our savagery — and the Portrait, who might find that the slipper he was carrying about in his pocket fitted that girl's foot better than mine, if I were not all the more prudent. If you were ever in Antwerp, when you looked at the cathedral tower springing up as if in triumphant escape from the wretched little booths and shops built against it; did it ever occur to you how those chimes playing the hours and half-hours up there in the clouds, had sounded those swift measures in elfish, tripping, airy intricacies of harmony not only for the glee of Antwerp, but for whatever befell through the Spanish Fury, with the men of Antwerp piled in dying heaps at the base of the tower, and through the shuddering decay of the gay and haughty city, and now in its

slow revival? — and always as you hear them, so coldly gay, keenly sweet, swift, fine, and far away. Just such an orchestra of petty piques and paltry pinings and girlish greed sounds with its fine pipings in the average soul. Whatever the rush and roar of humanity without, though the curtain is slowly rising on a new era and listening to its solemn chorus, the world waits trembling to learn what scene is set upon the stage. Do not blame *me*. I am an average girl of an average community, giving you facts as I find them. I am a geography. Would you fly out at a geography because it describes Siberia and Sahara? Indeed, is it so very certain that in my place at the board you would not move the same pawns? Long before my day the great Science of Naming Things was invented expressly to recon-

cile our deeds to our moral consciousness. Ask priests and lawyers if most actions have any more right to the names allowed them in polite society than a grocer's tea to the Chinese characters on its box. That very diagram is a tribute to the justice of my conclusions. It was accepted. At once the Committee on Other People's Business clamored that the artist should be accepted also. In view of some such contingency, the first rule of the club limited the numbers. But the Committee O. O. P. B. clamored only the louder; and on several of these occasions I saw "around the corner," like Bunthorne, the Portrait and Lucy Pepperton observing me with some earnestness, and I thought they wore an air of disapprobation. An excellent fairy godmother, that Operetta, thus far!

*“He will lie, sir, with such volubility that you think Truth a fool.”*

MR. SKEGGS — that is the man who accepted the *rôle* — is a human mosquito; he must always sting. Small, pale, dry, meek, he is an Edison for invention — of scandal. He will tell you a story absolutely ruinous to some other person, vouching for its worst details from his own personal knowledge, and stamping it with a “I know it is so,” in which there shall not be a grain of truth. It shall hold together by mere cohesion of lies; and for all that there will be a certain fitness in it that will get it a hearing and belief. He has the relish for another’s loss or mortification or disappointment that you might have for

strawberries. Like a green looking-glass with a twist in it, he has an unrivalled capacity for letting you know the ill that others think and say of you, and for showing you at a disadvantage. It was not to be hoped that he could conceal his delight in the angles of the statues. As for his jokes about the Portrait's Pygmalion-like influence over so many Galateas, they were served up with the coffee at half the breakfast-tables in town. He found a similar charm in his *pro-tempore* partner, Mrs. Skeggs. That young lady appraised the goods of this life by some such singular standard as if, say, a pound avoirdupois was not a pound unless it had first been subtracted *vi et armis* from a neighbor's store or bin. She had indignantly declined a *rôle* as statue, and as eagerly accepted that of Mrs.

Skeggs, as something superior and wounding to her companions. But finding the Statues officered by Miss Pepperton and constantly attended by the Portrait, she turned sulky and mutinous towards the much-enduring Committee, and revenged herself by saying everywhere that her mamma considered "statue dances and poses indelicate and improper for young women of good family." The Statues retorted by giving in confidence Mr. Skeggs's proposed advertisement: "Wanted! an expression for Mrs. Skeggs's face; right one preferred, but any better than none." Through the social clearing-house of the town, these descriptive touches came promptly back to the subjects thereof. We live too near a great city to attend church armed with revolvers to shoot our enemies in the next pew; but we

did what we could, hampered by our police system and public opinion. Mrs. Skeggs would not look at Mr. Skeggs; Mrs. Skeggs would not look at the Statues. The Statues turned their backs on Mr. and Mrs. Skeggs, and were painfully audible (for Statues) and uncivil (for anybody). The Portrait played with easy naturalness and grace, but was quite unable to redeem the dramatic twist in the situation. And the Portrait had difficulties of his own besides, when at this juncture in rushed three masked Burglars, after the manner of the Tarrytown Band, with loud cries, heavy tramping, bursting of doors, overturning of chairs, and noise enough to wake the dead; for these young Burglars were — for reasons — in the mental position of resenting everything in general, and the Portrait in particular.



No one in one's own circle views, or is viewed, with unassisted vision. Acquaintances are taken like liquors, not "straight," but "warm with," or compounded in punches or slings of what one knows about their grandfather, their plate, their note-paper, their brother-in-law's defalcation, or their daughter's marriage in Paris. And I dare say that is the real reason why travellers and strangers are apt to impress one as crude, impossible, odd, or unattractive, because we see only one edge of their identity. In our town, at any rate, people are viewed altogether within the limitations of what we know or think we know about them. And nowhere are these limitations more sharply defined than between the churches, — I mean by that those called Episcopalian and Presbyterian; the German and Roman Cath-

olic communions being considered by us simply as concessions to the lower classes. It is for some mystic reason understood that a Presbyterian woman will not of her own accord call on an Episcopalian woman, as suspecting pride; and that all advances from "the lost sheep of the Church of England" are received by the Presbyterian flock with suspicion, as likely to savor of condescension. With all this well in view, we had selected Presbyterian Burglars as a bid in the Presbyterian ticket-market. We caught them with guile; we invited, coaxed, urged, lassoed them by aid of certain charming girls. They came; but it was John Knox and Mary Stuart, Patrick Henry and the Stamp Act, Benjamin Franklin and the Court of France. They were as happy, gracious, and accessible as three wooden images

from the tobacconist, refusing everything but to be daunted by the Pepperton upholstery. On our side perhaps we were too bland, too much like the Spanish grandees addressing each other familiarly, reserving for outsiders all the punctilio of their new titles. There is as much of that brand of original sin packed away in suburban towns, where incomes average from twenty-five hundred to three thousand dollars a year, as in the haughtiest court in Christendom; while certainly there is no more difficult going, than trying to keep step with somebody who has not a soul above buttons, who can never forgive or forget your silver and horses, and who will never allow you to take him at a valuation of his own sterling worth, — that makes the guinea, whatever the stamp.

*“ There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.”*

IMAGINE now this trinity of defiance, brought by the libretto into relation with the Portrait. Personally that young man was as unobtrusive as his coat; but he represented so many things,—his father's real estate, his mother's leading in society, his English tailor, the New York Yacht Club, a great many sardonic conclusions harvested from his own experience, and the immovable style of the whole race of cool, composed young men of the period. He had, besides, personal beauty and distinction, and the leading *rôle* of the Operetta, which he played with an art true to nature, and a

finish true to art. Against every one of these details our impetuous young Burglars of the other Church were in full bristle; for we are very apt to tell ourselves that Number Two thinks too well of himself and is conceited, when all the time it is we who think too highly of him for our own comfort, and get no relief in declaring that we despise him, because in reality our contempt is envy.

In the libretto, when the leading Burglar had bound Mr. and Mrs. Skeggs, and the subordinates had gone in search of the silver, the Portrait introduced himself as a reporter of the New York "Herald," there in a professional and strictly neutral capacity, to get the first account of the burglary in for his newspaper; and the Leader explained, for the benefit of the "Herald," that he belonged to "The Scientific Protective

Union of Burglars," for equalizing the distribution of goods, — not in the old-time noiseless, sneaking manner, after the fashion of wrongdoers, but openly and aggressively, as a right. As the Leader grew interested in his argument, the Portrait saw and seized the advantage, wrested the Leader's revolver from his careless hand, bound him, locked in the subordinates, unbound Mr. and Mrs. Skeggs, and reversed the whole situation. The crescendo movement of the music, expanding here into a vigorous quartette, with a refrain from the Statues, was counted as one of the best moments of the Operetta. But the head Burglar, who throughout the dialogue had been sarcastic, jeering, whatever you like that is intolerable, here clenched the revolver hard, and refusing to sing, proved to us that the turn of events was ridic-

ulous and unreasonable, — more than hinting, also, with boyish petulance, that the Portrait was the saddest mistake of all. There we were, facing in earnest what one hopes only to read about, — an “unprecedented situation;” till the Operetta’s one Policeman, seeing our critical state, rushed into his part to our rescue. He was one of those hard, stout, smiling, red-faced men that are apt to be general favorites, no one knows just why. His coming turned up the lights and set the “Wheels of Progress” again in motion. As when the water began to drown the fire, and the fire to burn the stick, and the stick to beat the dog, and the dog to bite the kid, and the kid to go, and the old woman to get home, — all the sulky *dramatis personæ* came out of their comatose condition and “played up”

in a joyous revulsion of feeling to the Policeman. He was padded, and provided with the swagger and stutter of a certain well-known officer. And when he hunted for bullets in the walls and furniture, indifferent to the shouts and kicking of the imprisoned subordinates, and severely reproved Mr. Skeggs for calling the police at that uncomfortable hour of night, and sympathized with the masked Burglar as an honest and ill-used citizen, and attempted to arrest the Portrait, who escaped by jumping through the window,—he was met and seconded in a way that threw the whole act out of dramatic balance, and was artistically unjust. Yet who could say, “Ladies and gentlemen, you allow paltry spite to obscure what is really graceful and sparkling comedy, and are giving the honors of the evening to



local hits and broad horse-play"? We could and we did shrug shoulders, and exchange those long, unwinking stares by which one talks without the dangers of speech. But our marionettes were now enacting a drama of their own within the Operetta's limits, tangling the leading-strings and confounding the action; and who could prevent them?

*“ The art of the Court, — as hard to leave as keep.”*

AND now it is probable, had it not been for the Pepperton colors at the mast-head, that the Operetta would then and there have suffered shipwreck at the hands of her mutinous crew. But no one was quite willing to shut the entrance-gate into such select society from the outside while his neighbors still remained within. So we came to the wearied and worried contemplation of the third act.

*“Methought I was — there is no man can tell what — methought I was and methought I had ; but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say . . . what methought I had.”*

HANS VON BÜLOW said that the monotony of respectability was driving him crazy. He wanted some common music, some exquisitely incorrect harmonies, some charmingly disgraceful tunes only sixteen rhythmical bars in length ; and not daring to be found listening to anything of the sort in public, had secluded himself with an accordion and a collection of negro melodies. In this sense we proposed that our third act should be after Von Bülow. The Portrait, who, you

remember, had escaped arrest through a window, followed by the inevitable Statues, rushed into the arms of the Cook Ladies' Association returning from a meeting of their order. He was received by them with enthusiasm on informing them he was exhibiting a show of Irish beauty, and that the police, in the English interest, were trying to prevent him. The Cook Ladies were some fifteen or twenty hobbledehoyes in calico gowns, armed with brooms and banners, and singing at the top of their strong young voices doggerel something like this: —

“ If the rulers of the country  
You're looking for, my friend,  
Just come and make a call on us,  
And your trouble's at an end.  
For it's Bridget rules the kitchen,  
And Pat that runs the stable ;

And ain't the two, between them,  
To whack the world just able ?  
Oh, no !  
Just so !  
To whack the world just able."

All the brooms down with hearty thumps at the "Oh, no! Just so!" music getting frolicsome; Cook Ladies change places, advance, retreat; music growing more furious; Cook Ladies spin across the stage; music settling into the lilt of an Irish jig; Cook Ladies "setting" into the jig. And very pretty dancing it was; and so happy as the boys were about it! while we felt the delicious thrills of diplomacy. I should suppose that great minds care nothing about diplomacy, and are simple, direct, and childlike, like Christians,—I mean like ideal Christians. But small minds get deep satisfaction from policy and

forecast and cleverness and management; and one of our best hours in this business was spent in counting over the families and fond relatives who would come to see and share the radiant satisfaction of these young men.

But surely Destiny is not a woman, as portrayed, but a man. No woman is so logically sarcastic! We had reckoned without our *Doppelgänger*.

We — that is, the Committee — held, as you may suppose, daily meetings; and at each one we said: "It will be better not to mention this at present, but to keep it strictly to ourselves; the effect in the end will be so much better." But this is the age of tattle. Our newspapers bring the most impertinent gossip about the world and its wife, and we call it — news. Nothing is sacred from a reporter or your neighbor's opera-

glass; and the only known method of keeping a secret is that used by the London "Times." That journal held one fast in its clutch for six hours. But it went into a state of siege! Doors and windows were made fast; no one went out or came in, and despatches were handed in through a window; and no mortal knew the why of it all but the editor and two men safe in his sanctum meanwhile. Now, that is an excellent, energetic method, but not possible in our case; so it goes without saying, that it was precisely as if a sieve had promised not to let a drop of water through. All our conclusions were handed about as small change for conversational currency almost before we had drawn them ourselves, and as a consequence established itself our *Doppelgänger* Committee. So regularly as

we met of evenings, did our *Doppelgänger* sit of mornings in critical conclave on our proceedings. It was like reading of one's self in an opposition newspaper to hear their comments. But not till the third act was actually on the stocks did a coalition of some of the most unlikely people in town oblige us to consider our provoking double in a serious light.



*“ Tongue, I must put you in a butter-woman’s mouth, and buy myself another of Bajazet’s mule, if you prattle me into these perils.”*

HALF-WAY up the middle aisle of our church sits a family conscious of possessing the correct conduct and ideas that may be called the hall-mark of aristocratic race. Benevolent, kindly, courteous, and entirely conservative, they are living exponents of the great power of negation. They are continually quoted and admired for what they refuse to do, say, read, wear, and believe. They come in gray gowns and thick shoes to satin and tulle assemblies. They think emotion in art improper, and that the correct manner is formal,

and proper upholstery a little ugly. But they condemn no one who yields to the popular impulse in these matters. They only explain to you, in all the pride of meekness and arrogance of humility, your own inferiority as you float down the stream with the rest of the rubbish, while they stand on the bank full of good wishes, and wash their hands of you. Then, too, they edit their own dictionary; and what its definition of proper and improper may be, no one can divine till he asks. Consequently our Committee, offering them an interest in the Operetta, learned that for any member of that family, anything enacted in the glaring publicity of an audience composed of their neighbors of the last thirty years or so, would be quite impossible, — though well enough, perhaps,

for those who had no such scruples. And though no one could be more anxious that the desired sum should be obtained for the church, they could not lend even their names as an indorsement for the undertaking. In short, our Committee came away from that house very red in the face, and morally tingling.

*“ Oh ! if you borrow one another’s love for the instant, you may, when you hear no more word of Pompey, return it again.”*

BUT who could have pictured them—the correct, the fastidious, the faultless—fraternizing, united by a common bond of indignation, and standing on our third act as a platform, with the extreme left wing of our little community,—the speckled sheep so nearly black that one never quite knows whether to countenance or cut them; the Adullamites! those who are avoided, discontented, whispered about; the intimates of Mrs. Adullam, and that lady herself!

There are women spurred by a craving egotism to ceaseless war with other

women. Such a one was Mrs. Adullam. Had she been ugly, she might have written sour reviews and set the teeth of authors on edge, or painted scandalous portraits after the manner of Ouida; for she was so unfortunate that she believed anything good, true, noble, whatever warms the heart and brings tears to the eyes, to be mere trick, grimace, stage-effect, copy-book, an outer fine polish over an inner formation of crystals of absurdity, meanness, and hypocrisy! And what else but sourness and malice could be the result of such a creed? Authors and women escaped, however, because thirty years before, by virtue of a well-cut nose and fine violet eyes, Mrs. Adullam had found the short and easy road to victory over other women, by the subjugation of every man who fancied blonde loveli-

ness. Copy-books teach us how a passion indulged becomes a tyrant. At fifty, urged by that same necessity of victory, Mrs. Adullam, like Napoleon, lost her head, and betook herself to dyes, paints, girlish slang and clothes, and — boys; and supplied a great want in our circle. When we found ourselves in a “Lord-I-thank-thee-I-am-not-as-other-women-are” state of gratitude, one could always finish the sentence to oneself — “even as this” Mrs. Adullam. It had even been supposed impossible that Mrs. Adullam should be invited to join our club. Yet now behold her bronze frizz and point-de-vice tight jackets, in friendliest conversation with those hats and wraps that piqued themselves on lack of style and fit, as unnecessary to their wearers. The tight wrap and the shapeless one “had long felt

the laxity of Church discipline, and errors in Church management." "Mrs. Adullam's father was a clergyman, and she was sensitive on these points." "As for variety-show dancing, and vulgar burlesque in connection with anything so sacred as getting money for the church—there indeed was need for instant interference. Besides, there was the Bishop's pastoral letter." In brief, Mrs. Adullam, who had hitherto resented her exclusion by playing *Doppelgänger*, saw the strategic importance of the situation and seized it, clever little Wellington that she was! And the most fastidious family in town, that had hitherto only nodded vaguely at Mrs. Adullam's audacious toques, recollected a text seldom mentioned out of church, it is so inconvenient and ill-fitting in every-day life: "Judge not,

that ye be not judged." Notes were sent between the two houses, they grew confidential on railway trains, and drove home together. The "family" supplied the text, and Mrs. Adullam preached the sermon in every drawing-room where she was received, with her accustomed sarcastic comments. The Bishop's pastoral letter, that everybody took for a meaningless shred of mediævalism, was found to have an edge in it. We had proposed to elude it by calling the Operetta "Dialogues in Series, with Vocal Illustrations." But such an evasion would only be possible in a friendly obscurity, whereas, Mrs. Adullam was turning the public dark-lantern full upon us. A hasty summons brought the Committee through a blinding snow-storm to an informal morning meeting at the house of our



President, Mrs. Pepperton; and that lady, being a woman of impulse, met us at the very door, a letter tragically extended in each hand: —

“Come in, ladies! Pray lose no time in learning how your labors are appreciated. The church must have money. The congregation is too poor or too stingy to give it. Even our clergyman declares he will talk no more about it, as he came to preach Christ, and not debts. Somebody must earn the money by their wits, and we who —” here her English failed her. She crushed the letters into my hand, — for as Secretary of the Association it was my business to read them, — and flung herself into the nearest chair.

The first letter was from the Ultra-Conservative-Adullam-Opposition, signed by a number of names that obliged

attention, — a formal protest against the third act of the Operetta as “riotous and indecorous” (they had never seen it, knew about it only from hearsay); and as unfit to be used in connection with a church benefit, and calling attention to the Bishop’s pastoral letter.

“Riotous and indecorous!” The Committee looked at each other quivering and scarlet. Mrs. Pepperton threw out her hands with an impatient gesture.

“That is nothing; you will find we are much worse than that. Read the other letter, and you will discover that we are heathen also, and that somebody from Bombay, or the Ghaut Mountains, or Siam, or Timbuctoo, for what I know, — some idolatrous rendezvous, — has arrived in order to tell us so. Read it, that’s all; read it!”

The second letter was addressed by Raya Yog to "The Ladies of the Executive Committee," and read as follows :

LADIES,— You have been graciously pleased to ask my assistance in an undertaking for "the benefit of your Church." Pardon a stranger both to your religion and civilization, if I venture to ask, "Of which Church?" For to my apprehension there are two,— one that I do not see, but of which I hear ; one of which I do not hear, but that I do see,— the Church of Christ, and the Christian Church.

The first, as I understand it, was founded by him you call your Saviour. A Jewish peasant, whose ministry among the poor and despised lasted only three years, ended in an ignominious death, and was in the opinion of the men of his own day a failure. Nevertheless, though the succeeding eighteen centuries, while acknowledging his name, have steadily disobeyed his commandments and disregarded his teachings, the mere preaching

of his word has been an energizing force that has altered the whole world and opened highways into its most inaccessible fastnesses, physical and mental. There has been life in contact with the mere dry husks of his teaching, as in the bones of Elijah. It has fallen out as he declared, "that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God;" and that which makes up the life of man to-day, — its activity, glory, and greatness, — found its motive force in the preaching of his Gospel, and has advanced with it step for step.

According to this Gospel there are two kingdoms, — that of this world, whose Prince had nothing in Jesus (Christ, who chose his own lot, having power "to lay his life down and the power to take it up," rejected all belonging to it, even a shelter); and the kingdom of heaven. Its gate is so far from that of this world that to enter it "a man must be born again." Its atmosphere is so different that the new man must be spiritual, — "flesh and blood [animal love and desires] cannot

inherit it." Its time is now, its place is here, — "the kingdom of heaven is within you ;" its centre is in the antipodes of Self ; that is, in God. Its law sets aside the pains and perplexities of earth, as electricity does time and space. It brings out succor, rest, and comfort from *any* conditions, without outward change ; as the sun-power draws out leaf and blossom and fruit, without levelling or smoothing the heap of refuse or the mound of earth. It offers one model, — a little child ; one commandment, — love, love that will give its whole life for another, a neighbor ; that is, he who needs you, — an enemy, a slanderer, a rival perhaps. It has one formula, — secrecy in almsgiving, praying, and well doing ; one reward, — Eternal Life, "Because I live, ye shall live also ;" one promise, — "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Is not this true ? Have I not correctly read your Gospel ? But does the Christian Church find or take "a kingdom of heaven" with it into the market-places and counting-houses ? Does it admit a working faith in its business and

politics ; or does it say something about "allegory," and keep its daily life and its religion in "water-tight compartments" ? Does it "love its neighbor as itself," when business is based on disadvantage of the neighbor, and society on the humiliation of a neighbor ? Is it in humility that it crowds the highway, asking for "greetings," and scrambles for "the highest places" ? Is it for secrecy that subscription-lists are arranged ? Where can I, a stranger, find in the collective doings of the Christian Church practical proof of the conviction that the real entities are unseen, and not of this world ?

Again, the Church of Christ names itself a Spiritual Church. It has one Ruler, — God ; "A Spirit who must be worshipped in spirit and truth." It has a teacher and protector, — a Holy Ghost. It is constantly attacked and accused by what one of your writers calls "an Unholy Ghost." It is in a state of warfare, "for Christ must rule till he has put down all enemies under his feet." It wrestles "not against flesh and blood, but against

Principalities, against Powers, against the Rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places," — a hierarchy of infernal splendor, the Order of the Wisdom of the Abyss ! That is to be triumphant for a time ; for " it shall manifest itself with signs and wonders that might deceive the very elect," working miracles, worshipped by the world. It is not an infant hierarchy ; for by what occult power did the Egyptian magicians parallel the wonders worked by Moses up to a certain point ? By what occult power did she of Endor show the likeness of Samuel to the hard-hunted Saul ? What mighty power withstood for one and twenty days the messenger to Daniel, — that messenger robed in whiteness of snow and dazzle of gold, shining from within as the burning of a gem in his clearness, his eyes as lightning ; before whom Daniel, prince, prophet, priest, seer, wise in occult lore, the friend of angels, " fell as one dead " ? Who were those who " withstood " while " Michael the great Prince of the Jews alone was with him in

these matters"? What darkly wise urging was that, calling the fainting Messiah to use the power given him of God for selfish ends, and so cut loose from the Divinity; subtler yet, whispering him to prove that power and test the promises in the services of his pride? What is "this Power in the Air," and its "Prince" against whom Christ and Paul and John warn all believers, — this Brotherhood of the Shadow that is "to prevail against the saints" till withered and shrivelled "in the brightness of the coming of the Lord"? "Allegory" answers, That Christian Church, that is to-day in the persons of its members the great business manager and land-owner and oppressor in that "world" whose "Prince" wars against the Church of Christ.

But the Word of Christ, that he declares "shall outlast heaven and earth," has taken to itself wings of flame, and has traversed the world, and is returning, "quick and powerful as a two-edged sword," blazoned on the blood-red banner of the Socialist, the Anarchist, and the Infidel. These deny the Christ,



but are keen to see that the great working force of the times is latent in that despised commandment of universal brotherhood. And as his own are mute, the very stones in the street are crying out against those mighty shrines of granite and marble, decorated with everything except obedience, where they have buried a dead Christ deaf to his poor, who sin and starve about his temples. And as the sun draws jewelled reflections from windows where are blazoned saints and martyrs who in life would not have been welcome in these costly buildings, and as the organ-swells fill all the solemn aisles and vaulted roof, there sounds continually a Voice, —

“They sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them. For with their mouth they show thee much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo ! thou art unto them as a very lovely song, of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument. For they hear thy words, but they do them not.”

His name is over the portal, indeed, but within are the counters of the money-changers ; and though you can read the signs of the skies, you cannot read "the signs of the times." And to those who still adhere to the Church of Christ, it has happened as he foretold, "and the days shall come when you shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and shall not see it." For they say unto you, Lo ! here, or Lo ! there, but it is not He ; and even as he asks, "should he at his coming find faith on the earth," do you echo the sad question, for he is rejected of this generation.

Compassionate then the embarrassment of a foreigner confused between creeds and practice, and kindly explain. *Is* your undertaking for the benefit of the Church of Christ? *Does* it invite the help of the obscure and neglected, and propose to delight not only your friends, but the helpless and the sad ; those hurt in heart and sore in soul ; those who know pleasure only by report? Or is it for a Christian church, for the decoration and

repair of some religious club-house, by way of coaxing the needed sum from people who are anxious to balance their heavenly book-keeping at the smallest possible cost, because of their earthly ledgers?

Yours most respectfully,

RAYA YOG.

*“She’s a good sign, but I have seen small reflection of her wit.”*

“THERE!” cried Mrs. Pepperton, energetically throwing out her hands as I finished the reading of Raya Yog’s letter; “there!” and again words failed her. To be called “riotous and indecorous,” and Pharisees! To be bated by a Mrs. Adullam and a copper-colored, or (if one is to be particular to a shade) olive-tinted, idolater, who no doubt said unintelligible prayers to some gold or ebony image with a hideous, leering face, and who believed childish absurdities about sacred tortoises and Buddha. A man to whom we had been condescendingly *explaining*, ever since

our evil stars brought him among us. Would you not call the Operetta rather a malicious jinn than a fairy godmother, playing a diabolical game of chess, and offering us check at every other move? Still, whether godmother or malicious jinn, none of us were disposed to abandon our Operetta. We were in love with our own scheme, and, like all love, it was stimulated by opposition. It was agreed, of course, that no notice should be taken of Raya Yog's singular and most impertinent letter. No doubt, in his ignorance of our language, he had not the least idea of what he was saying. The protest was a more serious business, and there was a certain relief in feeling that for that we could hold our author responsible. She had never been thoroughly approved among us. To begin, there was something in her very appear-

ance different from others, — an outward show no doubt of what was within (I mean her peculiar and original thinking), that imposed upon strangers as an air of distinction. They attributed it to a fine estate, an uncle in the Senate, or a grandfather at least. And of course when it was discovered that she was the mere nobody that she is, people resented their involuntary deference. Besides, her mind might be said to be a positive inn for ideas that had their capital in the next world, and were hopelessly out at elbows in this. In addition, she would never leave Truth in her well. She was always for having the goddess out in the light of day, and was inevitably repaid by such blows and bruises as must always fall to that mortal dwarf who will walk with an immortal giant. Never too popular, and

having no following to make any one afraid, she was in the natural course of the Libretto, like Fate, made to bear the blame of every one's failures and disappointments. She had never been allowed to select the *dramatis personæ*, or offer opinions; but the public held her accountable for every invidious criticism and selection. In retaliation she had been specially omitted from lunches and neighborly gatherings, and no Arctic explorer could find himself more thoroughly frozen in or out, than she had been in the Pepperton drawing-rooms. And now the Committee felt itself at liberty to turn on her in a united glare; for was it not her fault that they had been called "riotous and indecorous"? And Mrs. Pepperton, as spokeswoman, was just opening her mouth, when the offender froze the words on

her lips with a roll of manuscript. A fresh roll! A new third act. Some muttering, some hint of the intended protest had reached her only the afternoon before, and her quick wit had caught at the truth. She had written all night. The Broom-dance was swept away; there was no Broom-dance. The Committee might write at once to the "Protestants," and in courteous phrases give them to understand that the Broom-dance had already been relinquished as "unsuitable;" and the third act was to take place in a young ladies' seminary! In fact, the Hobbledehoy Brigade was to be held in reserve for a fourth act, and in place of the Cook Ladies' Association, the Portrait would take refuge in the Chiff-Chaff Seminary. There he would present the Statues as his country cousins, for whom he desired lessons



in deportment. Once more the Pepperton's working carriage made its omnibus rounds, and stood before the different doors in town, while eager neighbors watched its shabby green linings and cynical coachman in quivering anxiety; and ladies said to each other afterwards, with attempted indifference, "that Mrs. Pepperton had called, and that Jane or Marie was invited to act as a Chiff-Chaff girl,—if that were the name; it was something like that, at any rate." The daughters of their mothers were equally well satisfied. Young ladyhood has restraints as well as compensations. The length of one's hair, the turn of an ankle, the grace of a jump or a skip, all kept severely secret by every well-bred young woman, may be quite innocently displayed,—put the clock back to girlhood, and the young lady in Chiff-Chaff Semi-

nary. And fifteen girls, who knew where to keep their feet under their short skirts, and within what bounds to shriek, giggle, and skip, made such a pretty show of dimples, bloom, and archness that it was already counted as the feature of the Operetta; while a general burst of laughter received the dialogue in the deportment class, that was already winging its way about in town talk. As thus:—

“How should one cut a shabby acquaintance with perfect politeness?”

“By a faint smile, that grazes the shabby forehead, and then slants away, over the heads and shoulders of those nearest.”

Class proceeds to illustrate the “faintness” of the smile, and to “slant” it correctly.

“What is the first principle of deportment?”

"To call attention to one's gown."

Class proceeds to pose with a view to the "gowns."

"What is the second principle of deportment?"

"To assert one's superiority."

"Superiority to what, young ladies?"

"To everything."

"Precisely how is this best accomplished?"

"By a stolid deafness and consistent blindness."

"Exactly; the class will now recite the creed of the deaf people who have ears, and the blind people who have eyes."

Class all together: "I believe in being deaf, dumb, and blind to all strangers, landscapes, chance remarks, works of art, interesting incidents, and ordinary civilities of life, on all streets, railways,

and steamboats, and in all hotels, theatres, and picture-galleries, and everywhere in general."

Class proceeds to illustrate "assertion of superiority."

"Very good! Now, young ladies," and here Madame Chiff-Chaff turns her cold eyes on the Statues, "there is something too free, too wild, too — too — too natural about your demeanor. You keep your feet far apart. Pray observe. You should in your gait try to convey the idea that a woman moves about on castors and without joints. Your arms are too limp. Hold them more closely at the top, and stick them sharply out at the elbows. So! Shorten your steps, if you please! Stiffen yourselves! Try to give an impression of no limbs and general helplessness! Class, attention! The Chiff-Chaff young ladies

will now walk in single file before these young ladies — from the country — and give them an object-lesson in style."

Class proceeds to give the object-lesson in "style."

This dialogue required so little mental effort, and could be applied in so many ill-natured ways, that it came up, like Jack's Beanstalk, in every lady's parlor. But at the same time there was a positive explosion of indignation. The withdrawal of the Cook Ladies and their broom-dance set free the Genii in the bottle we had just been made to open. Our Hobbledehoys had been captivated by the rush and jollity, the rhythmic stampings and "fetching" chorus, of the Cook Ladies' Association. They were flattered to be of use and importance, and were pleased perhaps with the novelty of a real interest outside of

billiard-rooms, bar-rooms, and green-rooms. Then young people have, besides, an unhealthy appetite for unripe, indigestible things, like grievances, and our boys were prepared to fight for this one as if it had been a Stuart or a Bourbon. They formed themselves into a "Society of United Brooms," wearing a silver broom as a badge, and were loud and bitterly witty on the subject. And as the ill-omened Genii we had just unbottled would have it, at that time the town fell heir to a scandal.

*“ Will it serve for any model to build mischief on? ”*

As one takes children to visit a menagerie and stare through the bars at lions, cobras, and other venomous forms of unhappiness, so did an official prominent in the Church convoy a neophyte, a young Daniel not yet come to judgment, through the whirling, glittering maze of a great public ball in New York. While thus engaged he beheld there another well-known face, another suburban youth, unescorted, with no official guardian angel, — there on his own responsibility, and enjoying himself completely! Very likely the horror-struck official talked in his sleep; and his wife — told nobody, but she radiated it

throughout her circle. Perhaps she could not have retained the secret within her system with safety to herself. A member of the ultra-fastidious-family-who-had-protested thought it a duty to inform the mother of the "unescorted" young man, etc. Everything hooked into everything else, like the "House that Jack built," till the whole circle about that young man took fire and blew up; and the fastidious family cut the unescorted young man on the street, because it was a duty to save their own olive-branches from the upas-like influence of the unescorted one.

But as all the town, except those most concerned, knew, those "olive-branches" also attended the fatal ball in New York, also unescorted; only—the prominent church-member had not happened to see them.



The gossips were as busy and merry as crows. The "united brooms" composed locally impertinent and transparently mystic songs and catches. The severe party's Christianity seemed to have risen to the surface and turned sour, like cream in a thunder-storm. Mr. Skeggs, by steady perseverance, could scarcely collect and retail his improved edition of half the comments in town. It was spring-time for him. His sallow face wore a look of positive animation. And as his light top-coat twinkled in and out of innumerable doors he was happy as a sparrow with a straw or an end of thread. The insinuated scandal concerning the "olive-branches" who attended the ball "unescorted," and the severity of certain persons who would do better to turn the microscope on their own fields, gave

flavor to the dry theological discussions about the Bishop's pastoral letter, when applied to "dialogues in series with vocal illustrations." And when it is remembered that an Iliad of what each lady might know or suspect about other members of the "United Brooms" was also in order, it will be seen at once that formal calls became for the time endurable, while we quaked behind the Operetta that had opened the gates for this deluge of mud.

There were also very special results from the selection of a Madame Chiff-Chaff.

The music in duos and trios, with pretty little marching and tripping measures, contained also a solo for Madame Chiff-Chaff, requiring the best voice in the Operetta, a sense of humor, and a married lady, as it was probable if this

prominent *rôle* should be offered to a young lady that the other girls would resign in a body. The results that followed her nomination were unexpected, and came far afield, like the straggling tendrils of Virginia creeper, that, starting from a root on the southern side of our house, crept under ground, beneath piazzas and past steps and walls, into the light of day on the northwestern angle of the building.

*“ Ay! an you had an eye behind you,  
you might see more detraction at your heels  
than fortune before you.”*

HITHERTO our Operetta had manœuvred within what one may call the aristocratic section of the town, — if anything American can be aristocratic. For what makes up the woof and warp of an aristocracy under the Declaration of Independence? Or why are we trying to grow this impossible exotic under glass? Abroad, where families date, like rats, from the Crusades, or at the very least have neighbored each other for the last seven hundred years or so, American aristocracy is a ridiculous mushroom. Here it has

no record, no history, no Debrett of its own, and can have none. It is relative, differing in almost every county. It is always an open question, and forever in Chancery. Get yourself recognized at home ; and fifty miles away, perhaps, nobody knows who you are, and you are flatly denied. For example. Many years ago a New England Brahmin was traveling for several days on a Mississippi steamboat where his name carried no conviction with it. The Brahmin, as is often the manner of Brahmins, was small, dry, and insignificantly ugly. The Brahminess, his wife, on the contrary, was what may be called a sumptuous beauty,—delicious flesh and blood, in soft yellowish white and softer rose-petal tints, with dark eyes full of an inward fire ; a woman withal of statuesque and chilling dignity. The Brahmins took their caste with

them. They sat apart, ate apart. In view of all this mystery and seclusion, of a couple in such startling contrast as this so-called husband and wife, that explosive virtue, that, like carbonic-acid gas, is everywhere in the atmosphere, first smouldered, and then blazed; and in consideration of the insulted modesty of the other passengers, at the first landing the Brahmins were requested to withdraw. This was a Brahmin of Brahmins! And in a land where such horrors are possible, our aristocracy must always be like our divorce laws, — recognized in one State, and illegal in another. Nor is this all. As all Americans are already free and equal, we are burdened as we stand with a right to be maintained, — an everlasting equation, in which one is always trying to learn to what this equality is equal. If Americans are also to climb

the ever-climbing wave of pedigree, in order to speak reasonably about the thing at all, there should be a court, in constant session, on the claims, laws, precedents, and definitions of an American aristocracy. At present, if a man achieves money, he sets up a carriage, a coach-dog, and a coat of arms together; buys them all three. Aristocracy is only a euphuism for money, without prejudice from any genuine claims of descent, as I can soon show you.

There is in one of our smaller streets a house where you can step directly into the year 1776. In the hall hangs a brownish picture in a dingy frame. It is the portrait of a man who signed the Declaration of Independence, and filled so large a niche in the gallery of his epoch that novels of his day generally introduce his name, to give the proper

verisimilitude to their story. Here, too, are chairs once belonging to Marie Antoinette; miniatures of members of her court; bits even of that luckless woman's handiwork, given in personal friendship to men and women of a generation not more courteous or honorable than their descendants of to-day. Yet these people live in seclusion. I have even been assured that they are "common," — that is, poor; also, that a certain easy, gliding grace of one of these ladies was much out of keeping in her little parlor. "Out of keeping" for the children of men and women who led a life of mark in English annals; who shone dazzling at Versailles; who shared the retreats to the little Trianon; who helped with heart and arm to uphold the young fortunes of our Republic! But for a young lady whose grandmother smoked a pipe, and



whose father, being named Munday, has just set up the family motto in blue and gold, *Sic transit gloria mundi*, with all the appropriate heraldic beasts,—how well, I say, in the mind of our critic, this “easy grace” would have suited, how entirely in keeping! were it a thing to be bought, instead of an affair of inheritance. So if, according to Olivia’s Fool, “What is, is,” it is plain that our pedigrees should be found in the money article in the “Herald,” and are as variable as anything in an almanac. And there would be much less confusion if papers of aristocracy were made out for the current year, giving notice of those on their promotion and of those just counted out,—also local particulars and definitions; for in some sections nothing more is needed to achieve aristocracy than a glass window, in others a White-

chapel cart, in others a yacht, or a cottage at Newport. And taking it all together, was Raya Yog so very wrong about his two Churches? Since what can the kingdom of heaven, where the greatest hath the humility of a little child, hold in common with thinking of this order?

*“ You wear out a good wholesome forenoon in hearing a course between an orange-wife and a fosset-seller, and then adjourn the controversy of three pence to a second day of audience.”*

HOWEVER, as I was about to say, there is as much butcher, baker, and candlestick-maker among us as elsewhere, and the sort of circumstance called “unforeseen” is sure to have a root somewhere in the grocer’s zone. Now, almost in the centre of our town lies a broad street, clearly intended for a fashionable quarter, that for some occult reason has failed, — like a beauty of a wealthy marriage. And, spite of ambitious buildings, you are told “that no-

body lives there that anybody knows." This crushing social edict cuts off its inhabitants from us, and they might almost as well be the red and blue fish in the Lake of the Buried City for anything that we know of them. Intercepting this domestic Sahara are grassy roads, catching pleasant glimpses of curving shore and sparkling bay. On these have sprung up a mushroom crop of houses with so much Queen Anne and so little length and width that it is difficult to consider them seriously, not as toys, but as habitations. They are at once so fine and so flimsy that they have an air of being bought in a lot at some bargain counter. The paint is haggard; the walls and windows are out of line; the ornamental saw-work is impossible; the stained glass is unreasonable; there is a tradi-

tion attached to the cellar about India-rubber boots regularly supplied as a part of the kitchen furniture. These streets make up a Debatable Land, where side by side with people styled "common" and "impossible" live those who are neither quite in society nor absolutely out of it. The dividing-lines are so faintly outlined between that the best social naturalist could hardly have explained the selection that omitted one and invited her neighbor. Between those liable to be occasionally included and often snubbed, and those never recognized at all, there is plenty of friction and dissatisfaction,—all the more because, strangely enough, the local editors and attorneys have hitherto always been found in the "impossible" ranks.

In the very centre of this region lived Madame Chiff-Chaff; and Rome was

never shaken by fiercer contending passions than was the district around her by the news of her appointment. Mrs. Chiff-Chaff possessed the requisite voice and sense of humor, and was also in that essential state of marriage; it was said, besides, that she was of an excellent family. Why excellent, nobody knew, for nobody knew the family; but, like that other unknown quantity,  $x$ , everything is argued from it. This unknown family was also cultured, for some one belonging to it had once written a book. Had a woman been called a cook because she made a pie, the next question would have been as to the goodness of the pie; but as it was only a book, we were not so critical. For the rest, Mrs. Chiff-Chaff herself was stout, rosy, comely, clever, and executive, whatever the occasion, whether a church fair, a

funeral, or a wedding; and coming to be gradually adopted among us like an Idea, carriages from the Upper End of the town were to be seen more and more frequently before her door, — to the bitter discomfiture of her neighbors, specially of those across the way.

Here lived the local attorney (a sal-low man, with that hungry craving for importance that some people call ambition); also his wife, a bride of six months, and his father-in-law, Jeffries Harwell, — a famous name in Southern society half a century ago. The Jeffries-Harwell duels, their embassies, their love-making, their horses, their lineage dating back to the crusaders' tombs, — were they not all in the current gossip of their day? Their old manor-house, built with bricks brought from England, still stands, though no longer in the

possession of the family. There are also some wonderful sideboards and silver in existence, on which you will find their crest and initial; and the famous Harwell emeralds are, if I mistake not, at Tiffany's. Sixty years ago a Jeffries Harwell married the most beautiful woman in Philadelphia, — a city of beautiful women; but as such she is still remembered, together with the Harwell plate, lace, beauty, breeding, pride, folly, and fierce, impracticable temper. Also at the court of Napoleon III. figured a Harwell of such finished manners that his American extraction, if not forgotten, was forgiven. But acres vanished like mists, stocks exhaled like essence. Real estate is surely the most unreal and delusive of possessions; riches have wings; and without a setting of gold, of what value is even



an ancestor with the cross of a crusader on his shoulder? Nothing remained to Jeffries Harwell but that hypochondria hereditary in such families like gout, by which a man imagines that he is — not of glass, but of consequence, when he is shabby and out at elbows, and hustled by everybody. The attorney found his wife, who was twenty-nine years old and looked seventeen (a very wide-eyed, innocent seventeen), in a dingy lodging-house, where she managed the dinners and the bills for her father. Her sleepy blue eyes were tolerably well open to the chances of the life in which she found herself. She accepted the meagre attorney in exchange for her dimples, her “fetching” foreign airs, and trick of speech (she had been educated abroad), as a fair bargain. He was a lifelong quittance for herself and father for the

butcher's bill and the rent. Having a correct appreciation of her own attractions and tact, she thought of the suburban town, in which a home waited for her, as already conquered. Like other clever people, she underrated the resisting power of dulness. No one had ever heard of the Jeffries Harwells; and had they done so, it was like finding the Koh-i-noor tied up in a tramp's handkerchief. What unmentionable reasons could have induced a Jeffries Harwell to marry the local attorney? She attended the church reception, and the iron-clad, duty-doing ladies who addressed her were considerably startled by her readiness and her repartees; the air of equality, even condescension; the clever anecdotes, the society style, the self-possession, of the attorney's wife. It was whispered that she had been an actress, or a ballet-

dancer even. The Upper End carriages never came to her door. The butcher's wife, on her left, was of the opinion that there was more starch than Christianity in the Upper End, and strongly advised her to join the other church. The editor's wife, on her right, was of the same opinion. Commonplace women, all wrong about their hair, their skirts, and their grammar, nodded at her distantly, or overlooked her altogether. Her wit, her voice, and her dramatic cleverness were all needed in the Operetta; but she had not even been asked to join the club. She was filled with contemptuous rage; that bitter schoolmistress, Envy, kept her all day at moral subtraction, — subtracting the world's estimate of herself from her own estimate of herself, and finding the world in debt to her for a large remainder; subtracting

the actual value of her neighbors from the world's over-estimate of them, and smiling sardonically at the huge discrepancy. She was a woman of force, a woman to make herself felt. Besides, such a state of affairs is contagious; a malarial mist of scandal filled and poisoned the entire neighborhood, and from thence began imperceptibly to make a deadly way into a higher social plane.

*“Look you! the worm is not to be trusted but in the keeping of wise people; for indeed there is no goodness in the worm.”*

IN the heart of the town there is a large shop-window filled with repulsive fashion-plates, giving, as they are doubtless intended to do, painful notions of what not to wear. This suggests, in its own dreary way, a mantua-maker within. Here the Upper End ladies bring their old gowns to be picked out and re-made, and the smart waitresses and cooks their Sunday gowns. In addition, these last relate what they suppose they know, and think they see, of the family life of their employers. The mantua-maker, as middle-

man, retails this interesting information to those ladies who are of the Guild of St. Gossip. Also, the cooks and waitresses aforesaid take home their spoils to such of their mistresses as will hear them. The mantua-maker is, besides, on terms of humble intimacy with the butcher's wife and other ladies of that neighborhood, and attends all their little festivities as an assistant, waiting in kitchen or dining-room, ready for an emergency. Through her there is, as you can see, an ever-open channel of communication between the non-visiting sections,—a northwest passage about which there is unhappily no difficulty. So poor a creature she looks, so foolish, fluttered, and cowardly, it is hard to take her seriously. Yet, poor as she sits there, shrilly talking, she has cost a good man his good name. Sitting there in the attor-

ney's kitchen, it was her hand that wrote the *Mene-Mene-Tckcl-Upharsin* on the walls of the finest house in town, whose inhabitants did *not* visit the attorney's wife. The scandal mist was rising. In venomous twistings and turnings, it was creeping in at the Upper End. What the town had always known of Mr. Pepperton was that his gates stood wide open, literally for all. The wharf in his pleasure-grounds was filled of summer evenings by people who had no water outlook and sunset view of their own. His carriages were omnibuses. His boats took out half the town. To him the town owed its best street, and industrial activity. The church was a matter between him and the congregation. He took three fourths of its debt and worries, and the congregation, with much grumbling, accepted the rest. When his ten-

ants were straitened, and pushed into financial corners, he forgot rent-day,—sometimes many rent-days in succession. And wherever there was sorrow, his family first knocked at the door.

What the town now heard of Mr. Pepperton — in cautious whispers, of course — was that he took the bread of the orphan, and, after the manner of Ahab, was just about to add a widow's land to his own great possessions. The rumor was so poisonous to whoever touched it that it crawled and wriggled from one door to another, finding none to take it in. Still it lived and lurked and crawled.

The widow who owned the Naboth's vineyard in question bore a close mental resemblance to one of our hens, who sat for weeks on a turnip, threw all the food away from her chickens in the violence of her scratchings, and mothered a



three-months brood with that hysterical anxiety considered correct by every hen of fine sensibility. Some spiteful chance persuaded her that she needed our local attorney. Men, especially attorneys, are apt to rate their own services highly. Therefore he gave her for signature a deed that transferred her entire estate to him. Having, after the manner of her kind, signed the deed without reading it, she filled the air with weak wailings. The generous Pepperton blood came up at her appeal, and Mr. Pepperton headed an attempt to wrench from the attorney the widow's land. It was the election period. As a single energy in Nature develops things the most opposite, so there is a similar unity in daily life. You find the same faces in opposition on all the different lines of business, politics, theology, and society. The widow was

warned and advised well nigh out of any sense she had. "Mr. Pepperton simply wished to add her acres to his own. If she gave him, as was necessary, a power of attorney, she would be robbing and destroying her children and herself." The widow swayed helplessly, this way and that. "She was sure she could not tell what to think. Perhaps they were right! She could not see herself why Mr. Pepperton and those fine people who never called on her were so interested for her now." Scandal is the working-beam of politics, and the attorney's political friends were as anxious about the Ahab and Naboth rumor as he could be. They watched it as if it was a beloved child between life and death. Only, who could handle it?

*“It is proved already that you are little better than false knaves, and it will go near to be thought so shortly.”*

AT this juncture Mary McGinnis bought a new gown, — a green gown with a pattern in embroidery. It required much fitting and consideration, because it was intended to poison life for the upstairs girl and to bring the coachman to terms. During the trying on and putting off, Mary, who was waitress in an Upper End house, detailed to the mantua-maker how her master at dinner had repeated the widow and orphan story, describing it as a wicked and evident falsehood, and requiring his wife and daughters to stamp on it and crush

it out if it reared a head in their presence. That afternoon, in the attorney's kitchen, the mantua-maker brought out the waitress's story, among other items from her budget. The attorney's wife heard, and her eyes flashed. "My dear!" she said to the attorney that night, "there is no more honest, cautious, and solid man in town; he is one of the best citizens in the place. *Since he told the story, give it on his authority.*"

So indorsed, the story took air. Does any one doubt? I declare positively I am relating a fact. The story not only took air, it took the train. It was met in New York business circles; it travelled West; it even crossed the Atlantic. The local paper ached to publish it appropriately, but dared not. But bar-rooms and billiard-rooms were under no

such restraint. In vain the man who had talked to his wife in the privacy of his own dining-room protested, contradicted, and explained. People were now busy with the reasons that had brought this new David to covet the widow's ewe lamb. "He was embarrassed; he had over-bought, over-built, extended his operations too widely." No one knew just how; but it sounded business like, and everybody repeated it in a knowing way. Had Mr. Pepperton been a weaker man, of fewer resources and less nerve, he would also have been a ruined man; for there was some such rush on him and his operations as on a suspected bank. It is a strange sensation for a just man to know that there are very many people who firmly believe, and will always believe, in some impossible guilt of his, so that an

angel out of Revelation could scarcely undeceive them. But it is, alas! no rare experience. The scandal-mists wreathed and curled above the Pepperton roof-tree and many more besides. And now if it were not the mantua-maker who called the figures for this dreadful *Ça ira* dance, who did? And if the attorney's wife had not been denied all share in our Operetta, would that subtly selected Ace of Sponsorship have been thrown on the table? And if not, would the Pepperton credit have been so strained, and the Pepperton character been so cruelly smirched?

All this transpired, as one might say, on parallel lines with the Operetta. No one analyzed the matter; there was a vague impression of a violent outbreak of scandal among us, as if the epidemic had been scarlatina or small-pox. "As

the north wind driveth away rain, so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue." But no such wholesome wind swept our air clean of germs of malice and suspicion, and silenced evil tongues. There was no loss of caste for the scandal-mongers. All our men and women who disapprove of scandal listened to it nevertheless. They always do. Who has ever escaped from "the scourge of the tongue"? There was a warrior of old times who faced a giant and a Philistine army with undaunted composure, but who cried out in anguish "that he had heard the slander of many, and that fear was on every side." Indeed, I am learning to wonder at the anxieties and agonies about reputation; for who, pray, possesses one that will pass current in all quarters, and what hold can there be on a thing that is blown about

by the breath of a mouth? And, O Fairy Godmother! with such a storm in our horizon, why was there no warning, and never an umbrella of thy providing? Over what rough and stony ways art thou trundling our Pumpkin, and what strange and unwelcome passengers are we not to take on board? For myself personally, it was of course no season for glass slippers; the fairy prince needed rather a pair of scales to weigh out words and smiles to each of forty young women, each ready at shortest notice to pull somebody's hair. Still, there is a silent speech that is electric, subtle, and convincing, and nothing in that language came to me from the Portrait: he only accepted me like the other peculiarities of the Operetta. But, as you may remember, in view of that possible closing of our domestic theatre,



I was setting traps, not for Cupid, but Hymen, — two very different deities. My fairy prince was hunting nothing; he was strictly indifferent. Let  $x$  represent matrimony. Have you not often observed in such cases that if one party is Steadily Determined, and the other Lazily Indifferent, the equation is apt, give it time enough, to result like this: —

$$S. D. = L. I. + x?$$

Precisely! I placed my trust in the two P.'s, — Propinquity and Persistency, and postponed personal for public perplexities. These grew thicker and thicker in our way, as though they had a blossoming season, and we had lighted in the middle of it. And still no one turned a seeing eye on the Debatable Ground or the attorney's wife.

That lady had arrived at much popularity in her immediate neighborhood. It followed that ladies were constantly coming to her of mornings with bits of crochet and hemming and knitting, when she was not going to them with other bits of crochet and hemming and knitting; all solitary thinking and reflection being understood, in feminine circles, to be uncomfortable, and what is called lonesome. There are, of course, circles and circles. In some it is thought desirable to give off impressions from certain books, and these are called "ideas." And the going over of these books and their contents constitutes a literary conversation or a literary person, — just as the naming of the tools in a chest would make a man a carpenter, and the handling and cataloguing of models and marble would constitute him a sculptor.

In the Debatable Circle the talk was not of books, but of the relative weight of babies and virtues of sewing-machines, the only correct recipe for certain preserves and confections, and the one infallible method of dealing with that arch-enemy of the human race, that incarnation of original sin, the servant-girl. This constitutes housewifery, as the talking of books, culture. And the identical feature in both circles is that necessity for an unceasing twittering and a constant rushing about; so that in the attorney's house the neighbors might be said to ebb and flow daily in a regular social tide.

Consequently, the attorney's wife was among the first to discuss the impending cataclysm in the Presbyterian Church, and to get the rudder-cords of that laboring bark well within her grasp. Conse-

quently again, unlikely as it seems, the Pumpkin was derailed, the Operetta overturned, and that scandalous Ace took all our tricks.

*“I am for the house with the narrow gate, which I take to be too little for pomps to enter.”*

As we have all read, the modern Pilgrims to the Heavenly City travel by express trains, escaping the difficulties of the Slough of Despond. Apolyon himself, who is generally conceded to have been much misunderstood, is the engine-driver, and there are many and constant improvements on this important route. For example, Giant Despair, a very civil, amiable old gentleman, is now the conductor. No pauses are made at the House Beautiful, where they are completely behind the times, and the Valley of Humiliation is avoided.

But stop-over tickets may be had for the magnificent parks of Pope and Pagan. The last particularly show trees of colossal size and fabulous age, boulevards of wonderful extent and beauty, and mountains crowned by a marvellous series of towers, ascended by spiral stairways said to have been hewn out by the Jinn in pre-historic times. Guide-books are on all the trains. There are Pullman-cars for the wealthier class, each provided with a Wall Street ticker, and in instant communication with every market in the world. There is a sliding Juggernaut judgment-seat for crushing one's neighbor; also thimbles and yardsticks, bearing different ecclesiastical stamps, for measuring the Universe and the designs of its Maker, — all of which is the more desirable, as the journey itself lacks interest. The road runs be-

tween walls of rock that tower on each side, shutting out the sunlight of heaven and all notion of the surrounding country; and through the entire route the light is supplied by an ingenious invention patented by Apolyon. Thus it fell out that a passenger on this train, who had increased greatly both in wealth and in consequence in the Presbyterian Church, tried by his gauge his pastor, plodding along on foot over the old route to the Heavenly City; and the pastor was found wanting.

We of the other Church could of course count up the sins of our own rector on our fingers; but naturally we are not so well advised about Presbyterian infirmities. Apparently the wickedness was of that subtly spiritual kind that outwardly is of the most innocent complexion. This shepherd of the other

flock had provided the children with a Christmas-tree on which glittered angels in spun glass. There were flowers on his reading-desk in church. And worst of all, he was the most popular man in town with the young men who had grown up around him. These young men thought that their best evenings were spent in their pastor's study, — plain and convincing proof of something wrong in the study. What was the peculiar gravity of these offences, I do not know. The answer is as difficult as why in the Marian persecution a bishop should have been burned for teaching a seal to come to his whistle, and for dining at table with his domestics. What is certain is, that this pastor found himself suddenly obliged to leave the church that had been his field for so many years, to the astonishment of



the majority of his congregation. This astonished majority resolved to "swarm" with their pastor and to build a new church.

Doubtless you know what happened next. Leave a spider free, and she will spin a web! Give a Churchwoman of any denomination her head, and she will evolve a fair. It is a strictly feminine development, like a woman's lunch of sugared violets and sweet champagne. Men understand neither the one nor the other, — and, for that matter, are only asked to pay for both. It was here that the attorney's wife began to steer the Presbyterian barge.

"By all means," said she. "We will have the fair and forestall the Operetta (or they will forestall us); it will be easy. I happen to know that they are rehearsing without stopping for breath, because

it is impossible to give an Episcopalian entertainment in Lent. It must happen on one of the three last days of the week preceding. They cannot be ready for an earlier date. Therefore if we rent the hall and advertise our fair for those three days and evenings — ”

She paused expressively.

“But what will they do then?” asked one of her hearers timidly.

“Do? Do without!” and her eyes gleamed. “Let them wait till after Lent.”

There you have it, — or rather we had it. This was the news awaiting our next rehearsal.

“I call that — Well, on second thoughts, as these are ladies acting for a Church, we shall do better not to call it at all,” said the Portrait, under the first sting of the news. At this up rose the three

Burglars (Presbyterian, you remember), as on one spring, and — resigned.

“I will get you three better ones whittled out to-morrow,” said Mrs. Pepperton. But we looked blankly at each other. Were the Operetta a case of true love, all this would be in reason. But in a town wasting and eaten away with its own dulness, why did the very stars in their courses fight against us when we offered it something like amusement? And we could have spared anything better than a man. A man that can use his legs and arms and voice in amateur theatricals is as hard to catch in such a town as ours, as — an air of distinction. And here were three men gone at one fell swoop! It was possible to substitute women — strong-minded women asserting their rights, and also their superiority by their scientific

scheme of burglary. But however droll the dialogue, the scenic effect would be spoiled. It is the eye as well as the ear that the drama must convince. If you are to get in sympathy with an audience, you are not to tell them a thing has happened, but to make it happen then and there, and let them literally take stock in its action. Feminine burglars would look inefficient and unreasonable. At this juncture occurred the name of my Ideal Young Man, then visiting in town. He might be willing to take the vacant oar in our boat; and to me as an acquaintance (acquaintance, indeed!) was intrusted a note of invitation for him. Then the great question of dates came up for consideration.

The other Church had stolen our days, —at least the evenings of those days. We had not precisely bought those evenings;

we had no pre-emption claim in them. In that great moral common outside of the Law and its limitations, it is not so easy to stake off one's claims. Yet one hardly expects to find Church members scudding away around corners with your ideas in that Artful-Dodger style. We were witty and bitter and crushing; but there is nothing so stubborn as a fact. And, after all, the other denomination had pocketed our days; that could not be brushed away or rubbed out by the keenest sarcasm. To try to tide the Operetta over Lent, was virtually to abandon the affair. Everybody knows the deadly and death-dealing nature of things dramatic in amateur circles. Apparently there is something in the mere stir of anything theatrical that sets loose all the appropriate bacteria for killing off the grandmothers, uncles, and

cousins of the *dramatis personæ*; sending the actors into mourning, and out of the play. Then the jealousies! They alone would blow up the Operetta like so much dynamite, or eat it away like vitriol. From the very outset we had gone at once into a chronic condition of receiving resignations dictated by spite over night, and persuading the unre-signed resigners the next day to reconsider. Then the bouquet, the sparkle, the aroma of the present moment! That would exhale, leaving the whole affair flat and tasteless. Hold the Operetta over Lent? Bind the dew fast on the lawn! We accepted the impossible! Let the Committee for the fair keep their stolen days! (We insisted on styling them "stolen.") These were the last three days of the week before Ash Wednesday. The Operetta should be

given on Monday of that week, — this, although the fourth act was not yet in rehearsal, and although it embodied the most difficult conception of the Operetta!

*"I could be bounded in a nutshell, and think myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams."*

AND all this time the note to my Ideal Young Man was twisted and re-twisted in my restless fingers. All summer was in that name. The pale sand, the mighty opal arch of sky, the sharp hiss of the waves, the broad moors, silent but for the whistle of a blackbird here and there — why, I saw it all again! And when one name holds so much, is it quite certain that its owner would sit comfortably in the Pumpkin with the — Portrait? Or rather, as the Portrait was quite unconscious of the rôle of fairy prince that I had assigned him, should



I sit comfortably in the Pumpkin between my last summer and the programme for my future — theatre?

One of our problems in vulgar fractions comes up each summer, and each year is more difficult of solution. There is a bit of the family-tree growing in Vermont, and the children are sent there for the summer vacation. If Mamma leaves town she goes there also. But it really does not matter so much in her case; she is the balance-wheel, — important enough, but out of sight; nobody remembers her. And Papa — it would be absurd to think of Papa as going anywhere; he is the working-beam of — of everything. But I am the family Dial-plate, informing the world at large whether it is social high noon, or getting into the decline with us. Besides, how is a girl to meet — to know —

people, to find that younger theatrical manager, if she is rooted at home where are eight men who are as tired of her as she is of them? Is that brutal? It is true. Do you notice, *Truth is brutal*; and, in my opinion, with the brutality of a god, not a goddess, — she would never be so directly rude; anything feminine could, would, should, must, sometimes insinuate.

As it happened, last summer was a barren one; no invitations to visit any one till late in the season, and then at second hand. It was as a friend of a friend, to complete a party of six, that I was invited to visit an Arcadian family resident for the summer at Nantucket, or, more properly, at Siasconset Beach. Nantucket, as I dare say you know, is an island well out at sea, all its moors undulating in green waves, as though it

had just hardened out of the surrounding sea. The town, clean, trim, sleepily satisfied, sits on its hill glittering in the sun. It looks on a harbor blue as violets, shut in by long, low spits of tawny yellow sand, all of which makes a wonderful bit of coloring on a fair day. There are no finer complexions, better brains, or keener thinkers than are indigenous to Nantucket. Pioneers of thought and some of God's most unselfish saints and martyrs belong to her; plain living and high thinking has always been her rule; on her scale, brains rank first, religion gets in somewhere between, and money last. The dollar argument has not the same conviction in it as on the mainland, and there is a jungle and tangle all over the island of a stiff, sturdy American self-respecting independence, embarrassing now and then

to those who put their faith rather in money than in a common humanity.

Between Nantucket and Siasconset are seven miles of moor — seven miles of violets in May; of wild roses, honeysuckle, and sweet bay, later on. Siasconset itself is like an expression or a perfume; it defies photograph, brush, or pen. It was built, they say, in the time of good neighbors, when, if a man announced, "I want a house," his hearers replied, "Then come! Where shall we build it?" If one may judge from results, said hearers contributed not only labor, but any odd boards, gable-end of a house, remnant of a ship, or section of whale-boat, from their own door-yard; building them all in with entire impartiality. The houses are so low-pitched that one is all out of drawing beside them, and you get into relations with ridgepole and

chimney that at home would only be possible in a nightmare. They stand on broad, deep-rutted, grassy lanes, flavored with the salt breath of the sea, or the sweetness of bays from the moors, and showing through white shimmering mist or moonlight, as the case may be. And the moonlight is of such penetrating splendor — because, no doubt, of the clear purity of the air — that you feel it like a thrill. The air itself is that of the middle Atlantic, touching you with the same urgent inspiration. On the sand there is the usual joyous seaside bustle and glitter, where the long rows of striped awnings make a gay picture. The streets, or roadways, or lanes, call them what you like, are a daily charade. Fine young men in tennis-suits go about in operatic manner with wheelbarrows and pails; and “fetching” gowns, with

fair girls inside of them, are to be seen carrying plates and pitchers. The *chic* of "S'conset" is to be — primeval. It has not yet been vulgarized into a Rhine-pebble Newport, a regulation watering-place; and people whose breeding is manufactured by their milliners, and those who are on their promotion in society, fall ill at the station and go back on the next train. There are private cottages, and cottages to be rented, of various orders. But the real old blue of Siasconset life is to rent a fisherman's cottage a century old; add your Saratoga trunks at each end, to serve as library and extra sleeping-room, and experiment; set up housekeeping, and go back to the first principles of life. Perhaps, like myself, you have attributed all the pinches in the daily shoe to Mrs. Grundy; but that dear old woman is not

left behind at Siasconset. She never is, anywhere. She is here skipping about in flannels and ounce-hats. And yet at Siasconset I began to dream — that oysters and clams would be less reserved, perhaps in another shape of shell; and that if a giraffe danced at all, he must certainly dance the Boston dip; and that it was the pressure of our houses (that is, of the way in which the architect sees fit to build them) and of our servants (that is, of their ideas as to what one must or must not have in a house) and of our neighbors (that is, of what they think best to buy and use), and not by any means we ourselves, who really dictate and decide about what we call our wants and necessities. Besides, I really have always supposed that what was grand, classic, noble, poetic, lovely, was perhaps not precisely to be bought,

but that such qualities required gold, carving, painting, statuary — a deliberate and well-trained luxury, in short; as the peach needs the sun on the wall. I thought that plain, bare, and simple living was necessarily coarse, sordid, and full of discontent; yet here at Siasconset this very question was given me, with the rest of the Arcadian party, as a problem to solve experimentally. We were allowed no servants, — indeed there was no room for them. We were to face the most primitive conditions, and nothing was made easy for us, I am sure. I know as much of trigonometry as a cooking-stove; but that stove could never have been in its normal condition, — chronic dyspepsia alone could account for the singular performances of its oven. The pump was clearly a Knight of Labor, for it was always on the strike, and never



would be reconciled to us during our stay. Our young men (Harvard) split wood, made fires, brought water, prepared vegetables, went of errands, and — gave advice. We — made bread very bad or very good, got up omelettes light or leather like, dinners good or uneatable, as that tricky Chance that presides over neophytes would have it. We washed pots, pans, cups, and saucers. We swept. It was an honest experiment; and apart from the novelty and amusement of this primeval picnic, it seems there is a certain pleasure in labor *per se* that is as much a part of it as the pink blossoms of an apple-tree. And certainly there was evolved from this life more wit, more ideas, more cleverness, than in all the correct conventional doings of the entire winter. I have always had in stock an ideal house-party that

should express itself chiefly in epigrams, be deep in the poets, dyed in the classics, keen only about theories, principles, and art, and without a sordid nerve in its whole make-up; and I found it in an unplastered house as we sat about a kitchen-table trying to eat with three-tined forks. It was not a consequence of steel forks and kitchen-tables, but surely it is a result of the never-ending emergencies that made one active in self-defence, and of the primitive life that offered the senses so little, forcing the spirit to supply beauty and decoration. A year of cotillions, yachting, coaching, and polo offered no such harvest.

Here then was the cream of life. Without it of what worth are clothes, carriages, grandeurs of any sort? But it is necessary to take my conclusions

with a grain of salt; for have I anywhere hinted to you that my Ideal Young Man is a son of the hostess of the Arcadian party, and assisted in the Arcadian experiment? There was always in my museum an Ideal, though, like Benedict, I had no intention of looking after it. "Brave he should be, or I'd none of him; true, or I'd never cheapen him; gentle, or I'd never look on him; of brains and good address, or come not near me; honorable, or not I for an angel; energetic, and his hair might be of what color it pleased God." As it chanced, the hair was blond. For the rest — well, for the time being, for the rest I would have given bail. But I take it — one's Ideal is the morning star, pulsing and throbbing in a rosy dawn that shone never on sea or land. Conclusions drawn in this doubtful light

from an enchanted summer are not to be trusted. What, after all, was the witchery of that time but the old primeval trick? An attraction of atoms, molecular shifting, and vibration; matter once more fooling the subtle spirit in a gay masquerade of traits, properties, and qualities. Just as the sea and the stars call, and such of your dust as once belonged to them answers; as the warm breath of the pines on some clear height, or as low, close-nestling violets stirs, and that of you that once was as they, remembers and responds. Of such material is love, — the love of the poet and the romance. A glance, a dance, a sigh, a whisper, a thrill of the nerves, a bondage of the eyes, a subtle, sweet delirium, crying, Forever, and exhaling like the dew on the moors. The love that endures, stronger than age,

death, or the grave, longer than life, firm as truth, tender as a mother, the sunlight of the soul, is the absolute faith of a woman in a man's honor, gentleness, and goodness proved towards her; the firm faith of a man in a woman's honor, candor, and devotion proved towards him; a sureness of alliance and defence against the whole world; a sense of content and well-being found nowhere else. And all this found by the right man and the right woman; for many excellent people are not at all excellent for each other. And its right name is friendship. Such things are! Our debt to Julian Hawthorne is not yet old for his portrait of such a perfect marriage in the life of his father and mother. We are all the richer and better of that history. Its springtime of happiness is in a manner

ours, and we have a right to thank God for it. But such bliss is a true phoenix; it comes once in a thousand years.

How do I know, I, a girl? For what then are one's eyes and ears? There are all the decorous marriages of one's acquaintance ready for analysis, where there is no scandal, no outbreak, the married pair trudging on stolidly, but quietly enough; the man as weak as the average, the woman as shallow as the average. Each has discerned the other, and is ignorant of self; he laughs in his sleeve at her shallowness, she smiles behind her fan at his weakness. And one of these is the stronger, and rules virtually or openly; that is to say, one possesses an almost absolute power over the other. Absolute power is not only vital with all manner of evil, but in its very essence is transformation;

so that the absolute husband or wife is actually a wholly different person from the man or woman you knew before marriage, and seldom a better one. If marriage makes a new heaven for the time, there is meanwhile a new earth in process of formation, waiting for the couple who are soon to be turned out of Paradise; and very strange beasts are to be found in this earth.

What then *is* certain in matrimony? *Money settled on the wife.* And I was certain that my Ideal lacked money. Nothing could be prettier than this Arcadian experiment, or — more economical. It was a clever way of stopping Mrs. Grundy's mouth and getting over the summer at a cheap rate. I knew nothing about the Arcadian family and their assets. As I told you, I was invited as a friend of a friend, and no one

thought or spoke of money. Nevertheless, I was privately convinced that our summer philosophy was a graceful economy; ergo, that my Ideal was poor.

Yet oh, those clear mornings, life in the air, and gleam and flash on the waves! Those silent afternoons with a sapphire sea and turquoise sky, hollows and spurs of the sand-hills, all sharply outlined in the pale light! The twilight blushing in deepest rose almost to the zenith, and the still ocean parted in fire to let a round full moon into our upper air! Those nights of Haroun Al Raschid, while we wandered in the white moonlight, guitar in hand, through the wide lanes salt with the sea and sweet with clover, cinnamon pinks, and bay! One's theories and worldly wisdom may be at the finger-ends, but so



are one's sensations. How many better brains than mine have been mastered by a throb and a thrill and an ignis fatuus of romance! To send the invitation intrusted to me by the Committee to my Ideal Young Man, was simply to overturn the pumpkin, fairy godmother and all, — that is, to send it to his right address. But suppose it *en route* to the Dead-Letter Office, *via*, say, Siasconset itself. (There is no winter post-office at Siasconset.) Virtuous, truthful, proper, high-minded reader, I know already how you must disapprove of me, and how from the very beginning I could have had no caste with you at all. And still it costs me a blush to say that is precisely what I did. I addressed the Committee's invitation to my Ideal Young Man at Siasconset Beach, and posted it.

*“ First, a very excellent, good, conceited thing ; after, a wonderful sweet air, with remarkable rich words to it.”*

OUR Fourth Act opened on an empty stage, where entered the Portrait to a suggestive accompaniment of music. Mrs. Pepperton objected at once to the selection made. She said that Irish-wake music was undoubtedly very pretty, given in that measured time. For her part, she really thought Braham an excellent composer, let people talk as they would ; much of his writing was worthy of Sullivan. But as we were acting in the interests of the Church, and the town was in such a scandalous humor, would it not be better to choose something more classical than Harrigan and Hart? . . .

Lucy Pepperton grew scarlet. The Portrait suddenly vanished in the hall. The Committee, pilloried fast on sofas near the piano, were in a nervous agony. The "Irish-wake music" was Beethoven's, — an allegretto movement from Opus 14, chosen for a weird precision of skip suitable to the Portrait's humor, which was troubled, as was evident from his walk. Trouble on the stage always affects the legs; and so touched with gloom was the Portrait's stride that he very nearly ran against Madame Chiff-Chaff.

"So abstracted!" and the lady surveyed him coquettishly. "A penny for your thoughts, Mr. Washington."

"A penny is par value. My thoughts are below that," returned the Portrait, coolly.

"To the vulgar crowd perhaps, not to me, Mr. Washington."

Madame Chiff-Chaff drew a little closer. The Portrait eyed her apprehensively; then, aside to the audience:

“Gray hair in long braids,” said he; “wide hat with roses; shoes half a size too small! In a lady fifty-six years old, what might that mean?” Here she sighed. “Coquettish too! Let us take the next train, by all means.” Then to Madame Chiff-Chaff: “I was coming to find you, my dear madame, to say good-by.”

He stopped in consternation. Madame Chiff-Chaff had promptly fainted on the nearest sofa.

“Awkward!” remarked the Portrait. “Still, while she is there she is harmless, and it will be wise to go at once.”

Suiting the action to the word, he is stealing out accordingly, when suddenly the fainting lady sits erect with flashing eyes.

“Stop, sir! My bill, if you please, sir, before you go; my bill, Mr. Washington, for board and tuition of twenty young ladies for one week at sixty dollars apiece. Twelve hundred dollars! And had I known your real character and theirs before, I can only say the task would never have been undertaken at all.” And she sailed out majestically.

The Portrait fell limply into the nearest chair, and fumbling in his pocket, brought out, not twelve hundred dollars, but a dozen neatly folded little notes. He opened one and read aloud, —

We have a half-holiday this afternoon. Be sure and meet me near the statue of Lincoln. I have so much to tell you. And let nobody know.

Ever yours,

MOLLIE.

"They all read like that," said the Portrait, looking with haggard eyes at the audience, "all the dozen! Two of them have appointed the monument as a rendezvous, three the boat-landing, two the Episcopal church, one the post-office, two the railway-station, and two the Picnic Grove! Each charges me to tell no one else, and I have promised each girl to meet her!"

Here a servant brought in three letters on a tray. He opened the first. A bill for twenty pairs of shoes at ten dollars a pair — for the Statues. The second — a bill for twenty hats at ten dollars a-piece — for the Statues. The third — a bill for forty boxes of Huyler's candy at two dollars apiece — for the Statues. And thirty dollars for a week's chewing-gum. "Five hundred and ten dollars!"

cried the Portrait wildly. "Excellent; better and better!"

At this juncture entered the Statues and Chiff-Chaff girls. All the Statues were hobbling on high-heeled shoes. Every girl sat down on one foot, or else stood with one leg shortened. Every girl was chewing gum, and all were talking together and giggling violently. The Portrait looked at them critically, and suddenly threw up his hat. All the girls screamed at once.

"What is that 'for?"

"I have found a recipe for making my fortune, ladies; and I owe it to you. It came while thinking what charming wives you would make."

All the girls together: "Oh, you funny man!"

"Five hundred and ninety," promptly returned the Portrait.

All the girls in full cry again: "Oh, you funny man! Five hundred and ninety what?"

"The five hundred and ninetieth time in two days that I have been called a funny man; I have kept account in my note-book."

"Oh, you funny —" But the Portrait had vanished. The senior Chiff-Chaff hesitated, looked slyly around her, and edged towards the door.

"Better not take the trouble," observed the girl next to her; "it will be quite thrown away. He is engaged to walk with *me* this afternoon."

The senior Chiff-Chaff whirled about. "Don't tell falsehoods, miss; he is going with me."

"I have his note in my pocket."

"So have I."

Girl Number Three: "What absolute



nonsense! He is to meet *me* at the church."

"You!" (Girl Number Four.) "He is to meet *me* there."

"I beg your pardon! He meets me at the post-office this afternoon; I have his note" (Girl Number Five).  
"This —"

"His note — so have I!" "So have I!" "So have I!" Every one of the dozen girls was wearing the note in her pocket; each one was prompt to bring it out; and — oh, insult! oh, injury! — each note was found written in precisely the same words.

The curtain went down, but rose almost instantly; time being required only to draw the inner curtain that hid the main body of the stage. The Portrait, in turban, beard, and long robe covered with mysterious Oriental char-

acters, stood in a booth, showing shelves of bottles and hung with placards of, "For Sale Here, the World-renowned Charactagent." The Portrait was surrounded by an audience of men all masked, whom he addressed as follows: —

"Gentlemen, as you must have observed, everything in the universe is wrong and ill-fitting. It defies even our scientists, who could have made a much better world, but have little hope of setting this one right, as there is always a missing link somewhere. But nowhere is the inefficiency of Nature more clearly shown than in the relations of women to men. In the first recorded speech of man he lays the blame of what had just happened on a woman; and he has continued to do so ever since — justly! She is an anomaly in creation. She is

not to be reckoned among the animals, for she pinches her waist and her feet; nor yet among men, for she is incapable of reason. Properly classified, she might rank among the higher order of parrots, so ready is her tongue and her power of imitation. But it was never possible to get together a dispassionate jury on this question, because every man is the son of one woman, and has been, is, or will be, in love with some other. The back-stairs influence will always prevent the truth from getting into court. Strongly impressed with this evil, I have spent many years in Thibet, among the heights of the Himalayas, searching there under the guidance of the brotherhood of adepts for the means to put woman in her proper place. The brotherhood showed a certain enthusiasm on the subject, believing, from

occult philosophy, to one's view at a theatre, that there is very little in this world with which a woman does not interfere. In various clairvoyant visions I have seen and learned where to find the substances from which is manufactured the Charactagent. Here it is, gentlemen! The sublimated essence of lead contained in these bottles will reduce woman to her proper status in creation. Three drops in your wife's coffee, — and the potion, I assure you, is tasteless and leaves no sediment, — and your wife becomes a housekeeping automaton. Four drops might be necessary for the cook, as the cook is apt to be of a more virulent species. But four drops at the most will introduce into your houses an infallible house-keeping, cooking, washing, stitching, child-minding, always-in-time, never-

out-of-temper, self-running, non-eating machine, that can neither ask for money, read your letters, answer back, give advice, have ideas, criticise you, or put two and two together. Four drops for a dose; six doses in each bottle; five dollars a bottle. Reduction allowed to Charactagent clubs."

Tremendous applause! The music, which has all the while gone on in an undertone, rising to a stormy tarentelle, and then dying out in violoncello throbs, and a stealthy Conspirators' Chorus, as the Masks come forward to buy the Charactagent.

"I," said the first Mask, "have married the Whole Duty of Man in petticoats; and she is ready for me with chapter and verse on all occasions."

"I," said the second Mask, "courted a shy, timid, blushing creature, and have

married my master — and a hard one at that!”

“And I! And I! And I!” from a dozen eager voices as the Portrait handed out bottles of Charactagent and as rapidly pocketed purses and bank-notes tossed him in exchange, the music and all the voices swelling into a laughing ha-ha! chorus, till — a rush of notes and a change of key, and behold! Madame Chiff-Chaff, the Chiff-Chaff girls, and the Statues! The Portrait sees, and flies; the Masks scatter in every direction. The Portrait rushes across the stage and out at the nearest door as his hunters burst in at another. Hard driven, as they turn a corner he skims through a window; they appear at one end, he vanishes at the other, — the music going on with it all as in a pantomime, urging on the hurry and stress of

the situation, till, caught, penned in, bills and billets-doux shaken in his face with a shrill staccato chorus of denunciation, the Portrait is beaten back at all points — when suddenly there is heard a drum; an indescribable clicking, thumping, rattling, jarring; a few minor chords, — the grimly ridiculous Mariquette March! A procession, — black-masked, black-robed figures stalking solemnly with every sign of woe, and beside each — a woman? No; a thing of springs and knobs and joints and plates of iron, — a machine; an automaton; the victims of the Charactagent! And behind these, the Police. The husbands, trembling for their own safety, had denounced the Portrait, who sold them the wicked Charactagent instead of an innocent tonic solution of iron for which they asked. All the fig-

ures set at him in a stormy contra-dance of vengeance; and flying from one to the other in his despair, as the clock strikes twelve he calls on Midnight. The lights burn low. Show once more the pedestals, the Portrait's frame, the glittering Midnight Shadow. The music wails and shudders; the Statues stiffen, recede, remount their pedestals; the Portrait blends with his background; the curtain falls. Behold the Operetta whole, complete, finished at last; and the Committee charmed, and much disposed to think they had written it themselves, so well did it suit them! Then came a pleasant expansion of smiles and congratulations. The malicious Doppelgänger, the censorious town, the shortness of the time, and the difficulty of getting all this in smooth running order, were all for once locked away in the



skeleton closet, while we pulled knobs, and tried springs, and rattled plates, and shook metal clappers on the Charactergent's victims' tin armor, and satisfied ourselves that it was efficient and effective; still — Somebody says that women have antennæ; my antennæ it was, no doubt, that suggested to me something heavy and brooding, something gone wrong somewhere.

*“Fie upon ‘But yet’! ‘But yet’ is as a jailor to bring forth some monstrous malefactor.”*

MADAME CHIFF-CHAFF had not taken part in this rehearsal; in fact, she had not yet arrived. She was apt to be late; for with such an excellent excuse as three little Chiff-Chaffs, why should she bore herself with punctuality? Besides, from her house, in the Debatable Land, to the Upper Bay, on which stood Mr. Pepperton's dwelling, measured certainly a mile, — a mile of ice and mud. At first the Pepperton carriage brought to rehearsals those club-members who lived at inconvenient distances; but the favored passengers were so surpassingly boastful, and members liv-

ing within two minutes' walk of the Pepperton gates were so personally slighted, that the Pepperton horses perforce stayed at home rehearsal-nights. Still, she had never been quite so late; and as the occasion was special, we were restless and impatient. We stood about in groups and eyed clocks and idly wondered, when suddenly a Cyclone enveloped the Author, the Committee, Lucy Pepperton, the Portrait, and myself, whirled us across the hall to the library, and closed the door. This Cyclone was Mrs. Pepperton, holding a note and a long dangling newspaper slip.

"From Mrs. Chiff-Chaff," said Mrs. Pepperton; "just arrived."

"Then I wager," returned the Portrait, "that she has resigned."

Mrs. Pepperton turned sharply on him — "So you knew, then?"

The Portrait smiled. "Not at all; but it is in the run of this Operetta. From the very beginning nothing has fallen out in the usual reasonable way. Something like a malicious providence has watched over each step and thwarted it. Our coaching-party is out in some sort of a moral thunder-storm without umbrellas, and a worrying imp is always loosening our wheels in the bargain."

"I think I could name your 'malicious providence' and 'worrying imp,' if I liked," returned Mrs. Pepperton dryly, tapping the newspaper slip with an angry finger. "Just read."

The slip was from our local newspaper. It contained no allusions to an Operetta, or an upstart Upper End aristocracy, as we had half expected; only a cutting from "The Wabash Daily

Exterminator ;" subject, the wasting fever of social decadence, slowly eating away American society. The cause, it seemed, was not far to seek. Tea-gowns, tailor-made gowns, and amateur theatricals, especially amateur theatricals, were the social bacteria. And very bitter the writer was, particularly as against young married women, who fluttered away to rehearsals, leaving neglected husbands and children at home. From this point a local artist evidently intervened, and the description was trimmed, shaped, and fitted to Mrs. Chiff-Chaff as though it were a new spring wrap. Her special *rôles*, her personal appearance, the number and age of her children, the style of her house, and the object of the Operetta, were all included in the portrait. Mrs. Chiff-Chaff's note read as follows ;—

MY DEAR MRS. PEPPER-TON, — I am obliged, at the cost of bitter disappointment to myself, to resign my *rôle* in our Operetta. Mr. Chiff-Chaff and I both see that it is inevitable. The enemy shows too many guns for us ; the next newspaper-cutting might be worse. That pair of scissors that makes selections from the "Wabash Exterminator," hangs in a house not far from mine, and, like the pen, is more dangerous than the sword. The cause — as it will be necessary to state a cause for my resignation in announcing it, we may as well call it — the children. They are in thorough good health, and were I to spend three weeks in getting up a fair, or every day in the week in my neighbor's house, they would, I dare say, be in no sort of danger. But as it is ——— Fill in that blank as you like. The enclosed slip was handed in at our door anonymously an hour ago ; it may interest you.

Yours cordially,

LUCY CHIFF-CHAFF.

"It does interest me, and I know how to fill in the blank very well," broke in Mrs. Pepperton sharply, as the reading concluded. "But then — we cannot accept her resignation. As for that, people will always talk; and, after all, what does it matter?"

"If only other people would not listen," cut in our Author quickly, "it would not matter; but as it is, Mrs. Chiff-Chaff is quite right to be afraid and resign."

"Certainly; we ourselves have had some experience," murmured Mrs. Pepperton, with tears in her eyes.

"We have all had experience," said the Portrait, beginning abruptly to walk up and down. "I speak for myself. I could accuse myself as well as Hamlet. But, after all, I mean to be honest; I take myself to be a decent fellow

enough! Yet there is a version of me, extant in certain houses as a sort of society Belial, for the truth of which many of my fellow-townsmen are ready to die at the stake, as though it were an article of faith to them; they *know* it is all so. Mrs. Chiff-Chaff is right. Let her keep out of it; the game is not worth the candle. All the same, what are we to do now?"

"There is a girl," put in Lucy Pepperton unexpectedly, for she had been quite silent hitherto, "who sings better than Mrs. Chiff-Chaff, and as an actress ranks any woman in town. She will wear as many wrinkles and as much gray hair as is needed, and she will take the part without grimace or hesitation, because she is always trying to oblige other people, whether they use her well or not,—I mean the girl



who made the diagram for the second act."

"The very person! Lucy, that is a clever idea;" and Mrs. Pepperton treated her daughter to a burlesque embrace. "For that matter, I wonder she was never asked before." (The Portrait looked meaningly at me.) "Why not drive to her house now, and bring her here at once?"

Then everybody looked at me. Had it been ten o'clock of the next day, about which time *after* any event my wits always arrive, with drums beating and flags flying, I should have accepted the inevitable, picked up the nearest wrap, and proposed to go and ask her myself. But it was the present Hour. And there is the whole difference between Genius and Incapacity. Your Genius may have headaches and indi-

gestion, absurdities and superstitions; may be handsome or ugly, winning or detestable. But it has a hawk's eye, however the Hour may be masked, for the real face beneath; while Incapacity stumbles on and sees nothing — till the next day. Incapacity, standing in this case for me, caught a pitying and warning glance from our Author, and a flitting smile from under the Portrait's mustache, but was stupid enough to be simply angry, and to answer, icily, —

“Under our rules the whole society must ballot for Mrs. Chiff-Chaff's successor. It will be necessary to call a special meeting.”

“Perhaps, then,” retorted Mrs. Pepperton, on the instant all fire and ice from head to foot, “as you are the secretary, you will have the kindness

to call your meeting for to-morrow evening."

And turning her back squarely on me, Mrs. Pepperton seized the Portrait's arm and walked out of the library with emphasis. And how emphatic gait can be, and how much a back can express on occasion! The Committee hesitated, looked uneasy, looked foolish, and *dribbled* away out of the door in an unutterably guilty manner. Only our Author lingered a moment.

"Child," she said softly, "think a little as to what measure you give. Remember, it shall be meted to you again — in kind."

I instantly decided that I hated her worse than Mrs. Pepperton. "You are too kind, madam." Then I threw up my head. "But I assure you

you have entirely misunderstood the whole matter." Then I too turned my back squarely, and walked out, elated that I had not been left last in the library after all.

*“Go, sirrah, for all you are my man, go, wait upon my cousin Shallow. A justice of the peace sometime may be beholden to his friends for a man. I keep but three men and a boy yet, till my mother be dead: But what though? I live like a poor gentleman born.”*

MISS SKEGGS — that is, the young lady who filled the *rôle* — drove a Tub. And it was virtually understood that she and I in company should deliver the summons for a special meeting, at the residences of club-members, to avoid delay. We boast a post-office, it is true; but for various reasons our mail-deliveries are slow and uncertain. The process of steaming a letter open and resealing it must be a delicate one. Probably it

requires time, and sometimes, no doubt, letter-envelopes are injured beyond repair. This also was a season of special interest, and corresponding pressure on our post-mistress. For there were in the air scandals concerning a lady who received bulky letters from New Orleans, whispers of a betrothal or so, and all the Operetta tittle-tattle; so that, taking one consideration with another, the Tub-delivery was preferred. Miss Skeggs arrived at an early hour, like Phœbus, and ushered herself in, remarking,—

“And so we are to ballot for the girl we left behind us.”

“Precisely!” This was I, furiously addressing notices and shoving them into envelopes. I was just in that humor where I could think of nothing with toleration, unless it might be an old master or so, three thousand miles

away. And as I am not deep enough in Hermetic mysteries to take my spiritual self to Dresden and leave my "shell" to grimace and chatter among the other puppets of the town, there was no consolation in them.

Miss Skeggs tossed aside her muff, played a few bars at the piano to my further distraction, for she was out of time, and whirled herself sharply around on the music-stool.

"I wonder if she gets in, after all?"

"If! She must; there is no 'if.'"

"I am not so sure." Miss Skeggs came to my writing-table and stood reading the envelopes already addressed, one after the other, pushing them away in turn so vigorously that some of them slid entirely underneath a large portfolio. "One black-ball will exclude her, you know; I am good for that."

I had been thinking something of the sort myself; and her suggestion making me instantly feel like a conspirator, I could only mutter in an ineffectual way: "Take care!"

"Of what; of whom?" cried Miss Skeggs scornfully, re-arranging the portfolio. "You want her precisely as I do; that is, not at all. And there are four Statues and five Chiff-Chaffs who are of the same mind. Mamma considers her common."

Here sounded a voice from the doorway, "May I come in?" and lo! Mr. Skeggs, who had evidently spied the Tub waiting at our door. The lady and gentleman exchanged cool nods, and Mr. Skeggs seated himself in a lounging-chair with an air of enjoyment, his pale eyes fixed on my writing-table. Miss Skeggs shrugged her shoulders angrily,



and walked to the bay window, where she stood looking out at the street.

“Quite a triumph for the young lady who was not asked to join our club!” observed Mr. Skeggs, looking first at the pile of envelopes, and then critically at the knob of his cane. “They say she considers it kind of you to construct an Operetta with so much pains, into which she can step at the last moment and take all the honors, as she always does.”

There is a quietly considering look, as of one who listens to some unutterable folly, succeeded by a slowly dawning smile, quickly suppressed with polite rigor. I never saw any one who could not be successfully routed by this little trick of muscles; and I tried it without remorse on our would-be tormentor. But Miss Skeggs was less on guard.

“Let her buy her green gown and

toss her head when her chickens are hatched!" she exclaimed angrily, coming out of the bay window. Then, sweeping the entire pile of envelopes into her muff: "Pray, my dear secretary, are you ever coming? The pony has been standing out there in the cold long enough. I am sure you will excuse us, Mr. Skeggs, as this is society business. And then —"

I wonder if other men and women who write books find it intolerable to relate certain bits of the story. From the very beginning I have been dreading this envelope episode, and wondering all the way if I could not bring my reader to divine that I *knew* Miss Skeggs had hidden certain notices under the portfolio, in place of brutally admitting it in so many words. I was sitting at my table in hat and wrap, and

did not glance at her, having that irritated consciousness of her that one writing, and hurried, always has of a presence that is urging one. But one sees out of the side of the eye; and in that way I knew well enough that she hid certain notices under the portfolio. Which notices, I was not sure; but I certainly divined they were addressed to those friends of the Diagram-maker who would not only ballot for her, but would be zealous and lobby for her. And all the time I was conscious of this in a subjective way. I told myself that I knew nothing about it at all; that I was thinking of Mr. Skeggs's childish curiosity, and the equally childish spite between him and Miss Skeggs; and — final triumph of logic — that I quite forgot there were, or could be, any notices left behind at all, as I hurried out after Miss

Skeggs, and we drove away in the keen sparkling morning air. Still, it was with a quiver of consternation that I saw Raya Yog, he looked so unpleasantly penetrating as he took off his hat; and there floated through my mind the question, "For which Church indeed?"

In the way of our business we were to stop at half the houses in town. In each house there was a copy of the local paper, and we were plunged perforce into a discussion of the merits of the article fitted so neatly to Mrs. Chiff-Chaff. Sometimes the session lasted ten minutes, sometimes half an hour. Sometimes if there were two or three ladies, they all talked together. But they all said the same things, — "It's a shame, don't you know? And when articles as plain and evident as this one appear in print, it ought to be stopped,

don't you see?" — as if it had been some class in school repeating a lesson together. After a time I began to wonder, as I have done before, if we, instead of being, as every good American likes to think, the ripened perfection of the Ages, are quite civilized, and are not, after all, the most vulgar of enlightened nations, more vulgar even than the English. Witness the Delphic utterance given out from that special shrine, the New York Opera-House, and copied and set into circulation by the newspapers all over the Union; namely, "that the persons who remained and listened attentively to the last act of an opera, evidently were only in possession of a box for one night, and were anxious to get their money's worth."

Get their money's worth! And from

music! From what shop-keeping depths, in what bourgeois abyss, could that thought have come? Or rather from what stall of what fish-market? Out of the ashes of what mud-cabin, lime-hod, or washing-tub springs this arrogant belief in money as a force by itself, and this coarse joy in its possession? Or look at Howells's "Boston Silhouettes," those heads in black and white of the American Athenians, drawn with such delicate perfection and pitiless truth. That woman, for example, of old Bostonian strain and thorough refinement, who could not be satisfied with courtesy, good-breeding, evident honor, and a bright, attractive young manhood, but whose very inmost soul was wriggling (and Howells makes you conscious of the wriggle as if it were a physical misery) till she can discover

in what little local set she is to place this manhood, and how he is there regarded. Or take breath and think of the Philadelphians. Individually charming, hospitable, generous, irresistible, — if you have the right letters of introduction, or if your great-grandfather was born, and well born, in Philadelphia, — showing a really fine disregard of money and luxury as compared with claims of race, but hostile with a Chinese barbarism of prejudice towards all strangers; the terror of watering-places, the arrogant monopolists of hotels, the despair of hotel-keepers, a clan that have never heard that *noblesse oblige*. Woe is me, my country! Where is then our special excellence? In splendor and misery the English outdo us. In delicate finish of style and graceful economies, the French. In

sturdy truthfulness of life, universal courtesy, and feeling for Art, the Germans. For that matter, have we yet equalled the writing, thinking, and building of the sixteenth century, — even their work in gold and silver, and their carvings in wood? Is this full and perfect flower of the nineteenth-century civilization, on the American branch of the human race, only a compound of steam-engine, stationary washing-tubs, furnace-heat, ice-water, some special sort of mint-julep, and the ward politician? Are these, and the sentiments above quoted, our national contribution to the characteristics of the age, — *all* that is offered by the children of New England Puritans, of the brave men of Holland, and of the Cavaliers of Virginia? God forbid! Only in our town, at least among its women, there



is small suggestion of anything higher. Fit any hen of average calibre with a chin, a wig, a gown, and a perfect larynx, and bring her in from the barn direct; and judging from what one sees in poultry-yards and hears in parlors, she would, without further preparation, express herself as well and show as many traces of thought, and in no wise disgrace or startle any of the drawing-rooms into which we wandered that day. It was a short winter day, and soon over; so that we hardly reached home in time for dinner and a hasty toilette for the business meeting. On my way to this last, I saw again the pile of notices left under the portfolio, and ordered a servant to post them. I learned afterwards that this order was obeyed on the following morning, — that is, the morning after the meeting.

*“Let that be left which leaves itself.”*

THE meeting came to order after waiting an extra hour for seven or eight absentees, who were all, oddly enough, very special friends of the candidate. The balloting began. The candidate was rejected. There were five black-balls. One was sufficient to exclude her. Mrs. Pepperton made a brief address, explaining the urgency of the case, and assuming some mistake. The ballots were taken again. This time there were six black-balls. Mrs. Pepperton counted, looked thunderstruck, counted again, opened her mouth, shut it. Our accompanist touched her on the arm and whispered in her ear. Mrs.

Pepperton heard him, nodded gravely, and dismissed the meeting.

Hitherto I have left our accompanist unsketched, because I was not sure of my outlines. We measure others doubtless by ourselves, and there is no largeness in me, even for evil. It is not likely that the strongest stress could bring me outside of the usual; while in him there is a breadth of egotism amounting to genius, and an unbending selfishness equivalent to talent. I could be certain of nothing about him. His brilliant black eyes looked at you, denying everything; and at thirty years of age a brilliant carmine expressed his color and hid his emotions. This head was as well furnished within as without. He was fluent in three languages, he sang well, he sketched admirably. On the stage he was an amateur Beckett. At

the piano he translated Chopin with truth and tenderness. He wrote a clever note, and, to make him quite perfect, he was ingenious and ready for every emergency,—precisely the little man that one would like to buy and keep in a box, as so convenient in a house. Little; for Nature had tied all these qualities together, with ambition, and then placed this handsome, restless head on a body so small as hardly to escape dwarfishness. Poor; without connection, or influence, a clerkship would have been the only vista open to another man in his position. As for him, he was not so poor in resources. He adopted the profession of—becoming indispensable. At present he was indispensable to the Pepperton family; though as positions can be made, nominally he held one in the city, and went to and fro like other

business-men. His manner to every one was absolutely courteous; but I knew (by my antennæ, doubtless) that he detested me. Personally we were as antagonistic as a purple red and a clear red; while in his profession of being "indispensable," he eyed me in the Pepperton drawing-rooms as the old-established business does the new shop with so much plate-glass over the way. Now I had just been tripping in the path of moral rectitude. Any lie, spoken or acted, is a note-of-hand on which you are always in difficulties to raise the interest, and that is sure, sooner or later, to fall into some hands that will collect the sum-total at ruinous rates. When I saw our accompanist whisper to Mrs. Pepperton, and then remain behind us all, I was penetrated by a chilly belief that it was he who would collect this last

note of mine, and that the time would be sooner rather than later.

All our sense-perceptions are illusions, and mere seeming. Time and space are in us, not we in them. So evidently the events of the next few days were all enclosed in my imagination, and need never have been let loose on the outer world, could I at any time have summoned nerve to contradict myself, — a thing distracting to think of, in view of the veritable Pandora's box that my imagination proved to be!

On its return from the 8 A. M. train the Pepperton carriage stopped habitually at our gate. But on the morning following the business-meeting it drove directly past. Not even a hand or handkerchief beckoned from its windows. Later in the day a long seal dol-

man, containing Mrs. Pepperton, walked leisurely down the street, stopped two doors below, and — went home again. Evening came and passed, and still no word or note concerning the Operetta. Second day, same phenomena; and a visit from Mrs. Adullam. Seated in our bay window, I saw her squeezed, tailor-made gown coming up our steps, and a faint fear thrilled me. Mrs. Adullam's visits are as ominous of disaster as that clear air, in which distant sails and shores stand out with startling distinctness over a breathless, rippling sea, is of a howling, shrieking northeaster. Is there anybody to be discomforted, she comes in at the death as naturally as a hound goes after the fox. It is her nature to rejoice with those who weep, and weep with those who rejoice; so that from the very first instant of rec-

ognizing her toque, my alarmed thoughts were busy with the Operetta and with what could have happened to it; till at last the conversation reached the subject.

"I hear that project is altogether given up," said Mrs. Adullam, opening her eyes wide in a childlike manner; "and I am so curious. Do tell me all about it."

"Oh! one hears so many things in a town, Mrs. Adullam," trying on my part to look unconcerned. "Pray, who told you?"

Mrs. Adullam, airy, but somewhat disconcerted: "Oh! I never give names."

"Why, then, give the gossip? Anonymous information is about as reliable as an anonymous letter."

Mrs. Adullam laughed. "It is I who am anonymous, my dear—from prudence. My informant was anything but



anonymous. Quite direct it was, from headquarters;" and she looked me straight in the eyes.

"Headquarters — why every scandal comes from headquarters! Only last evening I heard a story about — well, about a lady that, if believed, will shut every door against her; and that story came from headquarters!" Then I looked *her* straight in the eyes. Blushing is not possible for Mrs. Adullam, but she turned yellow; she rose.

"You're a good counsel-keeper, my dear," she laid her hand on the door; "but it is of no use to try and pick up spilled milk. I assure you it is all over town. *Aufwiedersehen!*" And she went out laughing.

As I followed her into the hall I was surprised by a pile of letters on the library table, evidently just brought in

from the post. It struck me with a strange discomfort to see that they were uniform in appearance, and all addressed to me as Secretary of the Operetta Club. I opened them. From the Portrait: he should find it impossible to fill his *rôle* in the Operetta, and with much regret must ask to resign. From Lucy Pepperton: she resigned in the same words. From Mrs. Pepperton, the President: she resigned; no regrets of any sort. From the Author: she resigned with sincere sorrow. From the Committee: they resigned curtly and officially. So it seemed that, excepting myself, all the officers of the club had resigned, leaving it without a head or a house to shelter itself (for the Pepperton house was plainly out of the question), without prestige, nerve, or influence; in short, annihilated, spite of its forty remaining

members. My fairy godmother, the Operetta, was dead, the pumpkin smashed, the fairy prince escaped. What would everybody say, and what could I say to everybody? That was a burning question. Instinctively I began to arrange mind, face, and speech. "The Operetta? Oh, yes! Wrecked entirely. But when there was so much opposition, such scandals and jealousies! And the other Church, you know. They made off with our days; and after that —" I actually practised that speech. This disappointment stung me so sharply that I was really afraid I might say something — true. Looking out at window while so thinking and rehearsing, I saw our waitress at the gate with Mrs. Pepperton's own maid. The two heads were very close together, and there was a "you don't say so" expression on both

faces. One girl opened the gate, the other walked slowly down the street; and Bridget, who had undoubtedly seen me sitting by the long window, came at once to the library and began to be busy, not without some sharp glances at the letters and myself. There was a large table-cover, whose folds she seemed to find intricate; and when once sheltered in its midst, she began conversation.

"It's a queer world, now, is n't it, Miss? Mattie — that is Mrs. Pepperton's maid, you know — came down a piece with me just now."

"Ah!"

"And she is full of a story, Miss, about some letters that were never posted as they should be. Mrs. Pepperton was that wild, she had it all out at dinner; and the man, that's the waiter,

you understand, told Mattie. And sure, Mrs. Pepperton went down yesterday, or the day before, — I don't rightly mind which, — to the little house. And did n't she give them ladies there a tearing scolding for not coming to some meeting; 'for,' said she, 'such friends as they be, they might have come to her.' And then the ladies said, 'Sure they never heard nothing of it, at all, at all, till the next morning; by the same token it was too late before ever they got the letters.' And there was the post-mark on the letters, and a gentleman told Mrs. Pepperton how five or six more had been served the same trick; and the same postmark on all their letters too! And Mat, she is full of it."

Here Bridget came out of the table-cover and looked hard at me. "It is a

pity," said I, gathering up my letters, "that she has nothing better to think of." And then I escaped from the room; for it seemed to me so much of a pity, and the matter so very bad, that I was on the verge of crying. The Little House and the Great House were bosom friends. The Great House liked lounging in the shabby little parlor, where falsehood and meanness never entered, and the two gentle, deprecating women who lived there never spoke a bitter word about any one. There was a close intimacy, a loyal friendship, between these two families, so far apart on every other count. And the ladies of the Little House, as warm personal friends of the Candidate, had received their official notices of the balloting a day too late. I could imagine the scene. And that gentleman, darkly hinted at, with his in-

formation about other people. I thought I knew him, and that I was entitled to a sick headache in my own room, if only to leave the family questions unanswered.

*“Madam, the guests are come, supper served up, and you called, my young lady asked for.”*

ON the next day came a Moses' rod and swallowed up every other idea in a twinkling, — a card of invitation from Mrs. Pepperton! “Mrs. Pepperton at home,” and in the right-hand corner, “Theatricals.” The entire family gazed at that card as though I had just drawn an Andromeda lot. The Pepperton perennials we were prepared for; we counted them in the year's expenses; we could bear them. But this was an extra problem in vulgar fractions that could not have been anticipated, and was, we felt, cruel. Going was inevitable. To decline at any time in the year



would be to offend Mrs. Pepperton and convince every one else in town that I was ostracized and had no invitation. But not to go now, when hints about the delayed letters were flying about the town like sparrows, and the whole town had a hand to its ear, not to lose the faintest whisper, would be social suicide. Yet go in what? To go, when there is a girl in question, implies a gown; and as I am not on terms with a Mahatma, who might disintegrate something in a Calcutta bazaar, or for that matter at Arnold & Constable's, and re-materialize it again, how was I to get a gown? That *chic* is worth more than cost and trimmings, I know very well; no one better. If you doubt it, here is the history of two gowns in proof. They belonged, or rather they were invented, by a girl who as a society girl must

make an average appearance, or be socially bankrupt. More than that, her appearance was one of the wheels in her father's affairs. Any spiteful whisper that she was shabby, would be an injury to him that could be counted in dollars and cents. Yet a cent more, another yard of stuff, an inch of trimming of any sort, for the next three months would be for her as impossible as to add an hour to the day. Her stock in trade consisted of nine yards of brown cashmere, a wide brown hat, a brown ribbon, one pair of sixteen-button brown gloves, nine yards of white veiling, and a pair of thirty-button tan-colored gloves. From the cashmere she evolved a plain round waist, and a plain skirt without drapery. The brown ribbon was tied about the hat. The brown gloves were drawn well over the tight-fitting sleeves. She had

only hoped to look lady-like; to her astonishment she found herself a success. The plain dull gown everywhere met that instant pause, that silent, searching gaze, only given to *chic* and its development; it even earned a sneer. "Studied simplicity," said a fair critic in a picture-gallery. The criticism, in conjunction with the sneer, is feminine patois for beautiful. The white gown, like the Harmony in Brown, cut and sewed by herself, fitted her absolutely. She possessed no trimming, yet the poor little frock took the blue ribbon. The feminine solidity of the town thought it very fine to have all the men raving about one's gown and one's shape; but when one paid a small fortune for that grace of perfect simplicity, — and everybody knew how expensive was a French modiste's simplicity, — they

should prefer something more "home made." But no one suspected her father's straits, or the terrible strain of those few months; and she always vows to him that she was the Horatius on the Bridge in all that memorable time.

Still, that heroine possessed for her evening wear nine yards of stuff. I possessed nothing, unless I could subtract something from some member of the family. And here my eyes fell on mamma. Being civilized, mamma always, of course, wears covering, things in black,—you could hardly call them gowns. But a sister in New Orleans, hearing of her general shabbiness, had just forwarded to her a harmony, a symphony, a love in brocade, lace, and velvet, a thing of real magnificence, a gown to gloat over! Like a two-year-old child, it could stand alone. Or

do they (children, not gowns) stand alone at a year and a half, or at twelve months? I like to be accurate; but it is impossible to ask any matron of experience, as no one is to know that I am writing this tale at all. The gown was an absurdity as related to Mamma, for it is of so little consequence what she wears. Equally absurd for a girl of my age; yet what choice had I but to wear it? Mamma was rebellious. I never saw her so perverse. In ten years she had never once owned a silk gown of any description, and that velvet and brocade was really inconsistent! Yet she clung to it. She was superior to reason. It was impossible to convince her that I had only Hobson's choice (I have always wondered, by the way, who was Hobson, and what he chose), that I must go, and there was actually noth-

ing else in the house that I could wear ! Mamma was as doleful as Iphigenia, and Papa as disapproving as if, subjectively, it were not his fault, after all, not to have had more business capacity and a larger income. So dolefully preoccupied was I that it was only on getting over the Pepperton threshold into the blaze of candle-light, and a scent of violets, and the dying echoes of "Weiss-Rosen," that I began to wonder what that word "Theatricals" might signify in the right-hand corner of Mrs. Pepperton's card. Theatricals without me ! Theatricals undreamed of a week before, — of that I was sure ; I knew the Pepperton plans and resources. From what soil had been transplanted this Jonah's gourd ? Who would appear in them ? And, once more, why, at least, had I not been told ? Here I met Mrs. Pepperton, who

eyed me sharply from head to foot, nodded abruptly, and turned her back more abruptly, before I could get breath to explain Mamma's headache, or my grand gown could shrivel into Cinderella rags under her disapproving gaze. Mrs. Pepperton is a woman whose demeanor is in no need of footnotes or translation. She is as variable as the weather; but she has a signal-service of her own, and there is no mistaking her danger-signals. Like Cheviot Hill, "she sees, she thinks, she speaks." So many years of good-will and kindness linked our two families that it was as if one's aunt or sister were in a rage with one. But Joan of Arc would shrink from a Pepperton snub, raised to a three-hundredth witness power in the Pepperton drawing-rooms. Not to be self-conscious is becoming and comfortable.

But is it possible now for a girl who has some mental reservations about certain suppressed letters, under the bosom of a gown twenty years too fine for her, and wrenched from her mother at that? I felt my knees getting awkward, and my elbows and hands going wrong, and the want of a veil, or a mask, or an umbrella, or a friendly face in the intolerable light. As I turned I faced the Portrait, who bowed coolly; Lucy Pepperton, who grew scarlet; that Girl — the Diagram-maker, the Candidate. — and, hear, O Truth in your Well! hanging on her arm, Miss Skeggs, — Miss Skeggs, who owned the Tub that stood at the gate of my house while she sorted out obnoxious letters addressed to the Candidate's personal friends, and hid them under a portfolio; Miss Skeggs, who black-balled her! If the Diagram-



maker had lost an election, I had evidently won one, and by unanimous consent had been appointed scapegoat. Miss Skeggs's eyes met mine. She nodded coldly, and turned pointedly towards her companion. At that moment, "Have you seen the conservatory?" said a voice at my elbow, — a low, clear, un-English voice, that of Raya Yog in faultless evening costume and with something so evident in his face of that mask or umbrella for which I had been wishing that I took his arm gratefully.

*“What trick, what device, what startling hole canst thou find now to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?”*

THE conservatory was empty, and wore that air of mystery that belongs to silent rooms brilliantly lighted, as this was with lanterns and candle-brackets. The languid sway and swing of the “Lichtertanz” sounded far away. I looked at Raya Yog in astonishment as he placed himself in front of my chair.

“Now,” he said abruptly, “tell me about these letters. Oh, pardon! there is no need to rise. Consider it all said that you would say; there is so very little time! As a matter of course you will tell me that you do not know what

I mean; but you do know. The thorn of it all is at this moment rankling in your breast. Understand, I do not speak to you conventionally, but as to a human being in trouble for whom much more trouble is waiting. It is as if I said the house is on fire! You have five minutes for escape! Will you trust me? There is half an hour in which I can yet do something for you. After that I can do nothing. Tell me the whole truth; I am sure there is something yet to hear. You had no plan. There was temptation sudden and swift. Is it not so? Tell it me, and quickly!"

Why Raya Yog should meddle in the affair at all, or how he could alter its features, or at what value half an hour could be quoted, was to me so much black-letter; but there was conviction in the man himself, and, once embarked,

I found a distinct pleasure in boxing my own ears and in avenging myself on myself. There was a certain relish in offering this keen Oriental a photograph of myself done by Truth, not retouched or colored, and without attempt at pose. As for him, I have never found such an audience; as if each and every faculty of the man listened without comment! Only at the end he certainly glowed with satisfaction.

“Good!” he replied; “that is honest; that is best! I was sure you were not —” he checked himself. “Later on you will thank me,” he said, bowed, and left me. And, of all people, he joined our Author! Running after him to the door, I saw them meet, — she with the air of one anxiously waiting. A sharp glance about the room, a hand uplifted as if in signal, Mr. Skeggs came up to

them, and the three walked away, their heads bent down and close together. They went slowly up the broad staircase, where a fourth figure joined them, — the Portrait, if I was not much mistaken.

*“If a man will be beaten with brains, a’  
shall have nothing handsome about him.”*

SOMEBODY came and confided to me something about somebody’s velvet. . Somebody came and danced with me. People chatted and fanned. People smiled. People looked watchful. People looked bored. The music went on, as if sustaining and bearing it all up. Mrs. Adullam came up to me, and I vaguely noticed how her complexion and pink brocade looked as if done in Dresden china.

“You are brave,” said she, “to come to-night.”

I opened my eyes wide. (I could always be at ease with that woman.)

"Brave! Why? It is not so very cold. Are not you here, and three hundred other people?"

She laughed, and tapped me with her fan. "You are always clever, — sometimes too clever; is it not so?"

What did she mean? I hardly asked myself. It was like one of those dreams in which, although you are busily acting, a voice tells you the story, and you are never sure which is you, and which is the girl in the story, — on the principle of "I know when I am I, but who am I when I am thou?" There was more dancing. Mamma's brocade was a belle. Men like sumptuous gowns; they leave the shabby girls in corners all the evening, and strike a balance next day perhaps by writing ferocious essays on Woman's Extravagance, and Fashion's Follies. Mrs.

Pepperton came up to me with my Ideal Young Man and a "Permit me to present you."

Down sank my brocade in a minuet courtesy, while my heart sank much lower. "Dear Mrs. Pepperton, this gentleman and I are already acquainted."

"Oh! indeed!" bringing out each word with a dreadful distinctness. "As you never forwarded the note I gave you for this gentleman, and consequently he was ignorant that he had been asked to join our club, I thought that there must have been some mistake, and that, after all, you were strangers."

The gentleman in question promptly interposed. "There was a mistake, Mrs. Pepperton, but not of this young lady's making. The note was forwarded." And he gave me his arm.

"So then," and Mrs. Pepperton's tone



was very sharp indeed, "you had other reasons for not coming."

"Precisely; it was quite unavoidable."

"Indeed! and I was told — However," recovering herself, "I beg your pardon, I am sure;" and with a curt nod at me, "and yours also."

"I am not sure that we do pardon you," muttered my companion, looking after her as she swept away. Then, as we walked off arm in arm, "All the same, you know, I never *did* receive any note of invitation, or any note at all."

"I should think not," said I, promptly. "How could you, when I addressed it to you at the Siasconset post-office?"

"You did?" He stopped short, stared, laughed, stared again. "And might I — dare I — ask did you have *any* reason now — that is, any other reason — than a girl's 'because'?"

“Was it likely I should send it?” I glanced up and glanced down, after the fashion of heroines in circulating-library novels. “You had been in town three days, — had you not? — and I learned the fact from a club committee.”

I shall never see as much admiration in the eyes of any man for some really worthy action as I earned by this insinuated fib. But we were stopped short by a change and stir all about us. Ladies who were sitting rose and settled their skirts, and people began to walk in pairs towards the great dining-room, where a stage was set and seats prepared for an audience. There were no programmes; nobody knew of what nature were the promised theatricals. The music was from “Feramorz,” and my thoughts rushed on with it as if in it I had found a translation of the last hour. I began

to feel, with a thrill of sudden fear, that I had divined the object of the impromptu theatricals from the moment I became sure that everybody, like myself, was equally surprised and bewildered by this entertainment.

The curtain rose on — Raya Yog! A sort of simultaneous ah! stirred the audience. Except for a long and high screen, the stage otherwise was empty. Raya Yog came to the footlights, bowed, and began at once without hesitation:

“Ladies and gentlemen, there has been an accident. Something has happened to my Marionettes. The oldest, I may say the most reliable, members of my troupe (for there are marionettes and marionettes) are broken. We were coolly received at the last town before this. Our receipts were so small that my companion and I were stinted for

even bread and cheese. We came here on foot. As for new marionettes, as you see, you might as well have talked of going to the moon. I say this, not to complain, but to explain. There are marionettes that are sensitive and pliable, so to speak; they respond to the thrill of your thought, and gather to themselves something that is almost life: there are others that will always be wood. That is why I said that we had lost some of the best members of our company. We ask, therefore, the consideration and the patience of the honorable society."

He bowed gravely and retired behind the screen, leaving the audience in a state of positive stupefaction. Many of them were in actual doubt if he were not the owner of a troupe of veritable marionettes hitherto kept in the back-

ground. They could not even decide to laugh. The music began, softened and subdued, as an accompaniment to a dialogue conducted behind the screen by two voices, Raya Yog's and our Author's. What followed, is not easy to convey; and as every reader writes half of the book, unless you suffer your imagination to set the scene, I doubt if I can make it plain. You must fancy the beat of the music, the quiver of light, the perfumed murmur, rustle, and stir of an audience not only curious and astonished, but vaguely conscious of an occult reason for the speed, secrecy, and impromptu nature of the whole affair. Then you are to picture to yourself the Marionettes.

"Here," said the soft, deliberate voice of Raya Yog, "are two of my most spirituelle characters, Alice and Bessie,

— young ladies, as you will see, not long from school.” Enter the Marionettes, — Madame Chiff-Chaff and Lucy Pepperton, — red and white, round-eyed and staring, long braids, droll velvet jackets, and spangled skirts, wooden and limp at the same time. If they moved, they jerked and skipped; if they stopped, they leaned helplessly in impossible attitudes. You would have said there was not a joint between them. As the cleverness of it dawned on the audience, a storm of bravos and a perfect hail of clapping hands welcomed them over and over again. But not a ray of recognition illumined either face; they simply bobbed and stared, while the conversation was conducted behind the screen by two voices, — one accented after the English manner of fashionable young lady; the other — the other was one

in a thousand, a familiar voice with a peculiar drawl and catch. Many people declared afterwards they had recognized it from the first. Did I recognize it? No, not positively; but I suspected — anything, everything, as I waited, cold and shaking, for what was coming. My Ideal Young Man talked to me, I think; but I certainly never answered him, nor did I hear the opening conversation. I was asking myself again and again why had Raya Yog said that “in half an hour it would be too late”? And what had been done? And what could he do? And had it been too late? And what had I to do with it all? A great laugh from the audience brought me to the surface again. Alice had just announced to Bessie that she had been reading a newspaper.

“And why, pray?”

7

"I expected to find a heading in large black letters: 'The Modern Herod: A New Slaughter of the Innocents.'"

"You mean because you see no young men?"

"Precisely."

"Better look in Cinderella's house; they are all there, calling on her."

"I hate that girl."

"So do we all of us."

"If you could keep a secret —"

"Why, of course I can."

"Very well! We girls intend to boycott her! We shall invite every girl in the Set, and omit her; nod at her in dressing-rooms, and then make a circle back towards her; take all her special friends in the cotillon when she is upon the floor, and leave her no partners; and — Oh! what was that?"

"Some one knocked."



"Alice and Bessie," said Raya Yog in his natural voice, "are pining for society. I have provided them with a companion. Here is my most reliable Marionette, — the Operetta."

At the name and entrance of the Operetta, nods and smiles rippled through the audience. The reliable Marionette was Mr. Skeggs, painted in wrinkles, and wearing an old woman's cap and cloak, and a conspicuous legend, "The Operetta," on his shoulder. Far from the wooden helplessness of the Marionettes, he pirouetted and skipped with a sudden stop and flop every now and then, and an instantaneous doubling up that never failed to bring a laugh from the audience.

The conversation began again.

"Bessie, why did Raya Yog send us an Operetta?"

"I have no idea; there is nothing amusing in an Operetta."

"Especially as neither of us sing."

"I beg your pardon, young ladies" (the Operetta spoke for itself in a shrill falsetto); "I have been an Operetta for many years, and it is my experience that the people who sing the worst, like me best."

"Then by that rule we should be very fond of you. Pray what is your name? What Operetta are you?"

"Cinderella."

"I don't like that name."

"Nor I either."

"What a pity, my dears! For wherever I am, there must be a Cinderella. I am obliged to earn my living as an Operetta. I am in reduced circumstances, you see, having come down in the world. Once I was a fairy godmother."

“Rubbish!”

“Not in the least; there is no nonsense about it. Fairies are now as much out of fashion as the whaling industry, and must hang up by their heels in Fairyland like bats, or live in a book. I preferred the last; therefore I am the fairy godmother in the tale of Cinderella. But it is monstrously stupid, I can assure you, this living in a book. And the illustrations, my dears, they are positive nightmares! — particularly now that they do us in mediæval style, all out of joint and perspective. I was really unable to endure it; so I turned my pumpkin into an Operetta, and started on my travels. But I can go nowhere without my Cinderella.”

“Here she is, then,” said Raya Yog’s voice, and shoved in — the Girl of the Diagram! The audience looked, and

burst out again in applause. In stare, in limp, in wooden, wide-eyed helplessness, she outdid the others entirely, as usual. And I never saw such a head of hair, — such a tangled triumph of frowziness! She was painted as if the red on one cheek had been partially rubbed and smeared; one arm hung limp, and the other jerked stiffly, — the absurdity in this, as in the other cases, being heightened by the local element; that is, by the recognition, under this strange disguise, of a well-known and a very different person. I heard the audience laugh again and again; but there seemed a gulf between them and me. I was looking at a very different stage, where my emotions were playing a tragedy of anguished suspense. There was now not only that familiar voice behind the screen, — Miss Skeggs's voice, — but the

Marionette, played by Madame Chiffchaff, no longer jerked in marionette fashion, but walked; and the gait, as if one's feet were all corns, and one's elbow a handle to work the body along, suggested — Miss Skeggs again!

“My dear Cinderella,” said the Operetta, “go into a corner. Your poor old godmother always loves you, but these young ladies do not like your name.”

Here the Operetta laughed, the accompanying music went off, as at a cue, into “Sylvia,” the Marionettes bobbed, suggesting a nightmare minuet, and the Operetta danced a vigorous *pas seul* with such fun and fire that the audience did more than laugh, — it shrieked; and for five consecutive minutes Mr. Skeggs found himself popular. The voices resumed, —

“Bessie, are you amused?”

"Why should I be? Is an old woman and another girl your idea of amusement?"

"But, young ladies," said the Operetta, "how should you like my fairy prince? To be sure, he is somewhat spoiled and conceited."

Both voices together: "Oh! that will not matter."

"His manners are excessively impertinent."

Both voices together: "We do not mind that."

"He has been living for a time in the Arabian Nights, and he was so petted by the ladies of that society that one would think he was Haroun Al Raschid at least."

Both voices together: "You only make us the more anxious to see him. Have him directly."

Raya Yog's natural voice: "Be careful, please, of that wheeled platform; it has been broken and glued again three times already."

Here entered the Portrait, — literally as the tin god on wheels, Roman costume, sandals, eyeglass, and dress-coat, face painted into a conceited immobility, and a footman carefully drawing a wheeled platform on which the tin god was tied with labored clumsiness by strings and wires. Intense delight and vociferous applause, especially from the younger portion of the audience; while some elderly ladies sourly confided to each other that the Portrait was simply appearing in his own character.

"Now then, your Highness," began the Operetta as the stir subsided; "look alive, your Highness! Recollect you are no longer in Cashmere, but

in America with your poor old Operetta. And here are two charming young ladies waiting to be amused."

"Two, Godmother! one, you mean." And it became evident that the Prince had acquired a violent English accent in Cashmere.

"Ya-as, I always thought Cinderella a pretty girl; but, like that fellow in the opera, — the other opera, you know, — who 'was a trustee for Beauty,' I am a trustee for Form. It is bad form to amuse anybody."

"Only one young lady! Alice, do you hear that?"

"Yes; and I remember the Anti-Cinderella Society."

"Hush!"

"Why? They will never hear."

"Not hear, when you talk at the top of your voice?"



"How can they? They have not got their cue. On the stage, people can neither hear nor see till they get their cue."

"Very good, then; let us boycott her now!"

"Patience! She is already in her corner with her face to the wall. What more would you have?"

"But, your Highness," — this was the Operetta again, — "these young ladies are not amused."

"Why not, Godmother? They are looking at me. And, for that matter, why not take the contract yourself?"

"Not in this town, my son; I have tried that already."

"Why not, Godmother? They are always complaining of monotony and dulness."

The Operetta gave an antic skip.

“Highness, look here, and here, and here!” and turning and twisting like a fakir, it revealed pitiful rents and shreds and hanging rags of garments. “I have been all but torn in pieces already. ‘Do you mean to entertain my neighbor’s family as well as my own?’ says one. ‘And of course I do, my good woman,’ answered I, in all innocence; ‘the more the merrier.’ ‘And pray are you in Moody and Sankey’s, or in the Grace Church collection?’ cries another. ‘Not at all, my good madam,’ I reply politely, ‘as I should have no business in either. I am only a poor old fairy out of a situation and trying to get an honest living as an Operetta.’ ‘Such spectacles,’ says a third, ‘are immoral and degrading, and will lower the public taste.’ ‘Not to be done,’ I replied; ‘it is as low as possible already.’ ‘And

they would injure our town-hall,' cries a fourth. 'That also is not possible,' said I. And at that, my dear boy, they all set upon me, as if inspired to drive me out of town. I was obliged to fly for life. No, no, your Highness; better be anything in this town than clever or amusing."

"Ya-as," from the Prince (or rather from the voice that personated him behind the screen). "Dog in the manger, eh? Won't live and let live, eh? Beastly bore I call that! But I have my Aladdin's palace here."

"What of that?"

"And some admission-tickets. So you see you can give the tickets to the young ladies and show them the palace."

"Give the tickets yourself."

"Stupid! how can I? Beg your par-

don, Godmother! But do you not see that my platform is glued in three places, and that it is not safe to stir?"

"And do you not see that, for reasons just shown you, I am obliged to keep my face to the company?"

"Very good. Give Miss Bessie the tickets; she can distribute them."

I saw Miss Skeggs start; then she turned and looked at me, — an odious look; and a smile equally odious curled her lips as she turned away again and whispered. The woman to whom she spoke started violently, and then whispered in her turn to her next neighbor. The whisper spread and widened, like circles from a stone. A dozen persons perhaps turned and looked at me. There was a silence on the stage; the lights had been suddenly

lowered, a curtain softly drawn from an Aladdin's palace lighted, radiant, — a brilliant flashing from jewelled arches in the obscurity; the Operetta jerked itself down to the footlights, and stood holding three envelopes in hand; the Marionette Bessie hobbled forward to take them; a voice spoke from behind the screen: "No one can hear me or see me, as no one has any cue." She took the envelopes and read them aloud: "Bessie, Alice, and Cinderella." "Never! Cinderella shall not go." The Cinderella envelope dropped to the floor, and the Marionette jerked her foot over it. "Now she has no admission-ticket, and must stay behind in her corner," declared the voice with a peculiar drawl and catch, — the voice that was one of a thousand, Miss Skeggs's voice, in fact!

The audience sat stunned; Bessie and

Alice hobbled away together, the Bessie Marionette still keeping the admission-ticket under her foot.

"They are gone to the palace," said Raya Yog's voice, "and poor Cinderella is left behind."

"But she shall see the palace, for all that," piped the Operetta. At that the music from a weird throbbing minor rushed crescendo into a measure from "Coppelia," the stage burned and glowed in rose light, and the Aladdin's palace opened on the Statues and the graceful turnings and poses of the Statue dance.

There was a stir and consternation in the audience. Miss Skeggs had fainted, and was being taken out quite insensible. Heads were clustered together, and tongues wagged. As for me, I was dumb. I saw it all plainly enough now.

But for that half hour with Raya Yog in the conservatory the Bessie Marionette would have copied *my* gait and spoken with *my* voice. What an application of the social knout! And how like Mrs. Pepperton! — impetuous as a storm, rigidly honorable herself, and as merciless to all falsehood as she was kind-hearted and generous.

The curtain fell, and the audience overflowed into the drawing-room. Everybody talked marionettes and statues, and looked Skeggs, — who had been taken home, accompanied by her family. There was a hasty explanation between Raya Yog, our Author, and myself in a little curtained recess leading out of the library. “The detention of the official notices of the balloting had been discovered, thanks to the energy of our accompanist,”

said Raya Yog; and as he spoke his face darkened slightly. That gentleman had visited all the absentees, compared the postal dates on their cards, and notified Mrs. Pepperton. That lady in her indignation desired to make a public example: she wished to call a second business-meeting, and openly accuse and crush the guilty parties, and was with difficulty persuaded to modify this official justice into the play of the Marionettes. "But temptations are sharp and sudden with all of us," said Raya Yog; "and a girl in her short life has not had time to set up a rogues' gallery of them in her mind, or to realize that the worst thought may look as innocent as a can of dynamite. And there was another lady also" — smiling at our Author — "who was sure that you were true at heart. Then at the very last — for at



first he preserved absolute silence—Mr. Skeggs declared that he placed you, Miss Skeggs, and the official documents in her carriage; that before going he saw Miss Skeggs give a final shove to a pile of envelopes peeping from under a portfolio, with a suggestion of stealthiness that stirred his curiosity. He went back to look at them, and they were the cards that were afterwards mailed too late; but he had mentioned the matter to no one, not feeling sure that it was any affair of his. The substitution in the Marionette mimicry had been made, of course, at the last moment. Absolute secrecy had been observed. The Statues knew nothing but that they were to perform the already rehearsed Statue dance; the number of Marionettes had been so limited to preserve the secret; and the rehears-

ing — not of the dialogue, for that was only an impromptu charade between Raya Yog and our Author — had been something desperate; so also had been everybody in the secret in the endeavor to soften Mrs. Pepperton and omit that final flick of the knout. But, as inexorable as Justice, she held firm to the official meeting, or the Guilty Marionette; and with tears in her eyes kind-hearted Lucy Pepperton implored Raya Yog and our Author not to abandon the Marionettes, as her mother was entirely in earnest, and quite determined to strike at the guilty. Miss Skeggs's own conduct had lessened their reluctance; she had filled the town with hints that were simply anonymous accusations, and had disgusted everybody by walking about covered from top to toe with a new friendship for the

Cinderella of the evening, as though it were a sort of moral waterproof."

There was just one answer to make to all this, and I made it,—

"You are two good Samaritans. As for myself, I have begun my rogues' gallery on the spot. The first photograph is already hung. It is my own; for I am just as bad, after all, you know, as poor Skeggs."

Then I got on a proper expression, went out into the light, and met Mr. Skeggs, who instantly gave me his arm. "I have been looking for you everywhere," said he confidentially, "for I want to be praised. You owe me something,—indeed you do, more than you know, perhaps. Little Dave Skeggs may not be worth very much, but he never failed a friend yet, and you never needed a friend more. Somebody, who shall be

nameless" (here he opened his eyes very wide), "has personified battle, murder, and death for several days. But I had my pawn ready. Said I to myself, 'Better wait till I make *my* move;' for I saw our dear Skeggs hide those envelopes. And I think, by the way, that faint was real."

"I think it was," said I dryly; and, filled with disgust as I was for myself and all other shams, there came into my mind a sentence, heard a hundred times before, "The truth shall make you free." We struggle on through life under a heavy, galling yoke of appearances, shams, and pretences lest some one shall think or shall not think, shall say or shall not say, something about us; and the truth alone can make us free. I saw it as when a light is suddenly turned upon a dark road, and

stopped before Mrs. Pepperton. My mind was made up. There were standing near her Raya Yog, Cinderella, Lucy, the Author, the Portrait, my Ideal, a dozen Chiff-Chaff and Statue girls, and various men and matrons.

"Mrs. Pepperton," said I, — and at the sound of my voice an instant hush seemed to settle on everybody, — "this has been a most successful evening; and for me it has been something more. I have learned a lesson that I shall never forget. And, Mrs. Pepperton" (hastily, for she seemed about to speak), "do you like my brocade? It is Mamma's, you know. She lent it to me for the evening because I actually had no decent gown to wear, and of course it is too grand for me. But don't you think it is handsome?"

Everybody stirred and looked — how

shall I say? — breathless. And Mrs. Pepperton! She began, “My dear child!” — and then, woman of impulse that she is, seized and kissed me heartily; and as I emerged from her yellow satin embrace, somebody was offering me an arm with an air of chivalrous devotion, — my Ideal Young Man! So Mamma’s gown was not pirated from her, after all. I never could wear it again after that, you see. And (have you observed?) I have never told you whether I am pretty or plain. It was quite deliberate on my part; for, except Charlotte Brontë, in all feminine first-person writing the young woman begins with a hideous portrait of herself as a plain, and too often slatternly, person, and ends as fascinating and irresistible, so inevitably that I feared lest this sequence of events made a part of the

concealed mechanics of such a book, —  
a mental inclined plane down which an  
author might slide without intention.  
So you see I have been careful.

“If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended, —  
That you have but slumbered here  
While these visions did appear.  
Gentles, do not reprehend;  
If you pardon, we will mend.”











12

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 09776 746 9

